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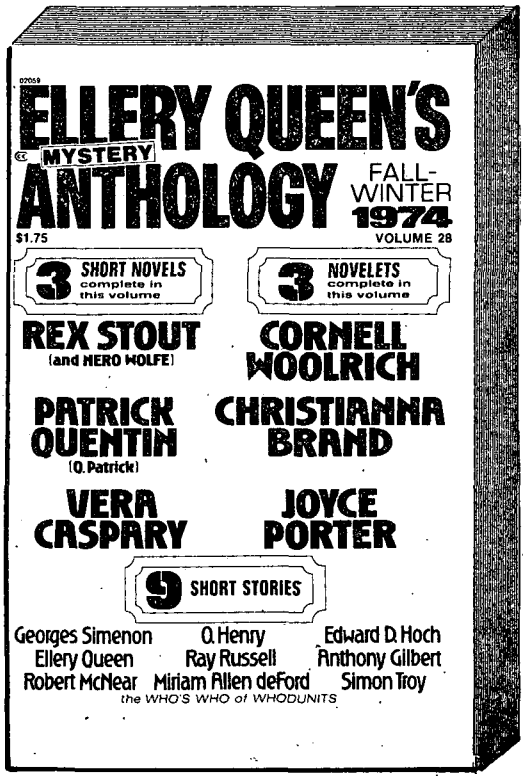

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a *NEW* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Mystery fiction is replete with heroes and heroines on whom you would unhesitatingly call for help if you were in trouble too serious to handle yourself. And surely one of the heroes who would inspire deep confidence is John Jericho, the huge red-bearded Viking of a man who is always on the side of the underdog and the oppressed, always striving to correct and balance the odds, always fighting to take the "in" out of injustice.

So when Jericho gets a call out of the past, from a woman he once loved and perhaps still loves, expect the big man to go into action with brains, brawn, and, if necessary, bluff . . .

JERICHO AND THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN

by HUGH PENTECOST

The call had come about ten o'clock in the evening. Jericho was not often to be found at his studio in Jefferson Mews at that time of night. Natural painting light was long gone, and the dark hours were usually a time for friends, for prowling, for watching the night people who were so much a part of the life of a great city like New York.

On this particular evening Jericho was at home, working at his easel under a bright fluorescent light. He was in the planning stages of a painting, working with charcoal on canvas in broad, almost angry strokes. He hadn't found the right balances, the right contrasts for what he wanted to say in paint.

The phone rang and the voice that responded to his sharp hello shook him. He'd not ex-

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pected ever to hear it again; it was low, husky, and it stirred many memories.

"Johnny—it's Laura," the voice said.

"I know," he said, trying to sound casual.

"Johnny, I need your help. Could you possibly come now, to our apartment?"

"Is your husband there?"

"No."

"Laura, I don't think I should—"

"It's very urgent, Johnny. I wouldn't ask unless it was."

"Twenty minutes," Jericho said.

There had been a time a few years back when she wouldn't have had to call him. He would have been there. It had been an unforgettable time in his life. People turned to look at them when they walked down the city streets, or in the country, or anywhere they might be. He was six feet four inches tall, 240 pounds of solid bone and muscle, with flaming red hair and a beard like a Viking warrior; she was raven-dark, tall for a girl, striding along beside him, proud to be his. And he was so proud of her. They had lived together and laughed together and loved together and she had joined in his causes which were endless fights against man's injustice to man.

Jericho had thought of himself as gentle, unselfish, endlessly concerned with Laura Walton's happiness. Surely she was all any man could ask for in a woman. But Jericho's fierce need to be where the action was—in the Far East, in Algiers, in the Congo, in Israel, always on the trail of today's terrorists—took him away from Laura for long stretches of time. She couldn't always go with him. She had a very good job with one of the top industrial designers. She didn't mention it often, but she wanted children. That was not for him, not yet. Not till his perpetual restlessness subsided and he could settle down somewhere.

After a three months' absence in the Middle East, Jericho came home to find that he had asked too much of this very special woman. Someone else had recognized her needs—for permanence, for a home, for everyday living, for children. She knew these weren't going to come from Jericho in the foreseeable future, and he knew it too.

So they had parted, sad over what might have been. Jericho found, in the next few years, that a part of every day was devoted to missing her. He never saw her, but he kept track. Her husband, David Power, was an attractive young

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man doing very well, ironically, as half owner of a highly successful travel agency. Travel had separated Jericho and Laura. But David Power didn't travel much—he only made arrangements for other people. Another fact about the Powers that gave Jericho an occasional bitter twinge was that there were no children. If that hadn't been a key issue he and Laura could have gone on together.

Now, after four years, she was calling for help.

Why me, Jericho asked himself. If her marriage was on the rocks she would never have called on him. She would never have asked him back. What special talent did he have that she could need so urgently? He knew people all over the world. Did she or her husband need a contact somewhere? She could have asked him that on the phone.

He began to feel a curious anxiety as he took a taxi uptown to the East Sixties where the Powers lived. Laura would not, in terms of their past, have asked him for anything at all unless she was desperate, in very real and deep trouble.

The Powers' apartment was in a remodeled brownstone on a very good residential block. Jericho knew it well. It had been Laura's apartment before she'd married and brought her husband there to live. There had been a time when Jericho had a key to the front door.

In the vestibule he glanced at the brass nameplate holder. Familiar names except one, and that was a new name for an old tenant. He pressed the button under *Power*. There was an instant clicking that released the door catch. He went in and started up the stairway, rather slowly, to the second-floor rear apartment. He could remember having bounded eagerly up those stairs.

She was standing in the open doorway at the end of the hall. She was the same beautifully built, dark, slender girl with, Jericho thought, the hell scared out of her. Her eyes were wide and her lips were parted as though breathing was an effort.

"Johnny!"

That husky voice! He kept his hands jammed in his pockets. To reach out and touch her would break the dam. She stepped back into the apartment he knew so well, the books, the drawings, the few very good paintings he had selected for her. Only one thing was missing—a vivid portrait of Laura he'd painted and that had hung over the mantel.

On the coffee table in front of the couch was an ice bucket, a single glass, and a bottle of bourbon whiskey—a brand he'd

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given up when their time together had ended. Evidently she didn't intend to join him. He stayed away from the bottle and glass, and stood with his back to the mantel. It kept him from looking at the empty space above it.

"I wouldn't have called you, Johnny, unless—"

"I know," Jericho said.

"It isn't fair to ask you—"

"Ask," he said.

She rarely smoked, but she took a cigarette from a box on the coffee table and her hands shook as she lit it.

"I have to tell you things that may hurt," she said. "My marriage to David has been almost everything I dreamed of."

"Almost?"

"We haven't had any children—yet."

He felt suddenly and unaccountably angry. "I don't propose to help you out with that," he said.

"Johnny!"

"Sorry. Look, love, tell me what it is without the background."

"David is paralyzed with fright," she said.

"It seems to be catching."

"It is catching, because he won't tell me what it is. Not knowing what is driving him off the deep end has become unbearable. I do know it's connected with his business."

"The travel agency?"

"Yes. Transocean Travel. He's half owner—one of two partners. The other is Elliot James, an old friend. Two weeks ago David asked me to go away, to leave town, to drop out of sight. He was afraid for me but he wouldn't tell me why. He won't let me go out at night. He's carrying a gun. I went to Elliot to ask him what was wrong, getting him to promise he wouldn't mention it to David. Elliot had no idea what could be wrong—and he told David I'd been there."

"Good friend."

"I think I must have scared him about David. And David—he was furious. That's the wrong way to say it. He seemed totally panicked. He urged me, he ordered me to go away somewhere—to Mexico or Europe. I told him I wouldn't leave him, that he must tell me what is wrong. Whatever it is, Johnny, he's very close to a total crackup."

"And you want me to find out what it is?"

"I can't go to Elliot again. I can't hire some professional investigator for fear it would get back to David. I couldn't think of anyone who might help but—but you."

Jericho felt his jaw muscles knot. "A woman?"

"Never, Johnny. Not David.

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Not without telling me, openly and honestly."

"You said you thought it was connected with his business."

"From the way he reacted to my going to Elliot."

"Is the business a success?"

"Fabulous. We've bought a little house in Connecticut where we go for weekends and holidays. The business is fine, at least on the surface."

"And below the surface?"

"I don't know, Johnny. But David is sick with fear about something."

There was the sound of a key in the front door. It opened and David Power came into the room. Jericho was shocked at the way he looked. He had lost weight. There were deep dark circles under his eyes. He looked like a man being tormented. He seemed to freeze for a moment when he saw Jericho.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he asked.

"I called him and asked him to come here, David. I—"

"I know why you called him. You thought I wouldn't be home till much later."

"Don't be a complete idiot," Jericho said. He looked at Laura. She could tell David why. They could discuss the problem, whatever it was.

"I ask you to leave," Power said.

"Please, David," Laura said. "Johnny might be able to—"

"Now!" Power said. His right hand moved toward his left shoulder. "If you don't—"

Laura had said he was carrying a gun.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," Laura said. "I'm sorry I got you into this."

"So now you're out of it," Power said. "So stay out!"

There was nothing to do but go. People who care for each other but can't talk ought to be spanked like children. One thing Jericho was sure of: David Power had not believed for a moment that Jericho's presence spelled the revival of a romance. He had been afraid Laura would do exactly what she had done—ask for help.

Jericho stood aside to let a girl pass him on the stairway, and then he went out into the night and headed back for the studio in Jefferson Mews, walking to try to wear off the things that had stirred in him. Laura was still Laura—she would always be something special for him.

He sat up for a long time when he got home, staring at his canvas, trying to reestablish his concentration, failing, thinking of Laura. Finally he went to bed and slept.

The next morning, while he was getting his breakfast with

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the radio turned on for the news, he heard that Laura and David Power were dead, brutally butchered by someone with a knife who had ransacked the Powers' apartment. The police did not know yet what might have been stolen. Possibly it was some drug-driven creep trying to find money to buy a fix. They were looking for a large red-bearded man who had been seen leaving the apartment a little before midnight.

Lieutenant Andrew Christie, Homicide, was an old friend of Jericho's. A squarely built, somber, gray man with pale blue eyes that had seen too much violence, Christie had worked beside Jericho during some hot summer nights in the city, nights hot with hatred and anger.

"I expected you'd be in," Christie said. He was at his desk at headquarters, working with a metal tool on the stem of a pipe that resisted unclogging.

"The girl I passed on the stairs," Jericho said.

Christie nodded. "And the Powers. You remember that I knew Laura when you and she were a thing. I wish to God I hadn't. It's not easy to stay impersonal when you know the victim."

"Did she—?"

"She fought like a tiger," Christie said. "Perhaps we can be thankful for that. She died in action, Johnny. No time for torture, or hope."

"Knife, the radio said."

"Forget it. Don't try to imagine it."

"Leads?"

"Nothing yet—no weapon, no fingerprints. No way to guess what the killers were searching for."

"You say killers—plural."

"No one man could have handled her the way she fought, and her husband armed with a gun. He got off two shots, both into the ceiling. Someone was struggling with him, while someone else fought with her. Only lead is the girl who saw a big red-bearded man leaving. I knew it had to be you, Johnny. Too much of a coincidence for it to be anyone else. I knew they must have been alive when you left or you'd have been in touch." Christie's eyes asked a question.

"She called me, asked me to come there," Jericho said. "It was the first time I'd seen her in four years. I loved her, Andrew."

"I know. And I know she wouldn't have sent for you unless she was in trouble."

"There was trouble, but God knows what," Jericho said. He gave Christie a blow-by-blow

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account. "She didn't know what it was, Andrew, but you only had to take one look at David to know it was very bad. She thought it was connected with the business."

"We've talked to Elliot James, the partner," Christie said. "He told us Laura and her husband were upset about something, that Laura had come to see him. He told us, and I quote, he 'hadn't the remotest idea' what was bothering them. Business is flourishing. No problems."

"Laura was certain it had something to do with the business."

Christie shrugged. "How do we find out? James is perfectly willing to give us access to books and records. If there's something there it isn't on paper, Johnny."

"Do you think the killers were searching for something in the apartment?" Jericho asked.

"It was torn apart," Christie said.

"That doesn't answer my question," Jericho said.

Christie raised tired eyes to his friend. He saw fierce anger there. "It may have been made to *look* like a robbery," he said. "But it occurs to me, Johnny, now that I've heard your story, the purpose could have been to silence David Power—and Laura, in case David had told her whatever it is."

"I'll buy that," Jericho said.

"There is something else you might consider buying," Christie said. "If David was being watched, someone else besides the lady you passed on the stair may have known you were there. What may be missing from the apartment is some kind of bugging device—which means they heard Laura's conversation with you. Which means—"

"They may want to silence me too?"

"Could be."

Jericho stood up. His muscles felt stiff from the acid of anger. "I would welcome that, Andrew," he said. "In fact, I think I will invite it."

"Watch your step," Christie said. "And I'd appreciate it if you'd dictate a statement for me before you go—just in case you get your ears pinned back playing hero."

The offices of Transocean Travel, Inc. were located in one of those towering glass fingers pointing to the sky in the midtown Park Avenue area. It was very modern, the office, decorated with colorful travel posters from all over the world. The receptionist wore a simple little $400 Rudy Gernreich creation. She could have cleaned up the

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beauty contest sweepstakes. The name plate on her desk read *Nan Martin*. She gave Jericho the appraising look of a woman who has no objection whatever to being considered a sex-object.

"Can I help you?" she asked, her smile dazzling.

"I'd like to see Mr. James," Jericho said.

"May I have your name, please?"

"John Jericho."

Her eyes widened. "The artist?"

Score one for a receptionist who knows her job.

"I claim to be," Jericho said.

Elliot James was anything but sinister. He was a healthy-looking, suntanned man in his mid-thirties; his clothes were expensive—mod but not extreme. He got up from his desk as the receptionist ushered Jericho in and came forward, his hand held out.

"This is a real pleasure, Mr. Jericho," he said. "Ever since I saw your Middle East paintings at the McClellan Gallery I've wanted to meet you. I don't think anyone else has ever caught the feeling of that part of the world as you have."

His handshake was firm, but not a crusher. Under any other circumstances Jericho's instinct would have been to like him. James waved him to a chair and went back behind his desk.

"I would never have expected you to come here, Mr. Jericho," he said. "You're the last person I'd have thought needed help with travel arrangements. You must know every trick to the trade."

Jericho took a black shell-briar pipe from his pocket and began to fill it from an oilskin pouch. "I haven't come to talk travel business with you, Mr. James," he said.

"Oh?"

"I was with David and Laura Power last night just a short time before they were —butchered," Jericho said. His pipe was filled but he didn't light it.

James' face twisted with pain. "Oh, God," he said. "The kind of world we're living in today is unbelievable. Those were two of the nicest people I ever knew." His eyes widened. "You're the man that girl saw leaving the apartment?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything wrong with David and Laura when you left them?"

"I think you know there was," Jericho said. "David was your partner. You know there was something wrong."

"I know that David was upset about something but I haven't the least idea what it was," James said.

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"That's what you told the police," Jericho said. He held a lighter to his pipe and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "But David told me what it was."

"He told you?" James said, and his voice wavered a little.

"He told me, and I've thought about it, and I've decided to cut myself in," Jericho said.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" James said.

Jericho thought he knew then, that James knew what he was talking about even though Jericho himself didn't. "I have decided to cut myself in for fifty percent," he said.

"So help me, Jericho, you're not making any sense. Cut yourself in for fifty percent of what?"

"I suppose you may have to talk to other people about it," Jericho said. "I'm willing to give you time. A little time. Say, till midnight tonight?" He stood up. "If you're not willing to make a deal by then I'll blow the lid off the whole operation. David told me enough to make that easy. And of course there will be a murder charge to ice the cake. I'll be waiting in my studio in Jefferson Mews for your answer."

"You have to be out of your mind!" James said. But he didn't move from his chair as Jericho walked out of the office and past Miss Martin, the hopefully smiling receptionist.

It was a warm, beautiful, summer evening, as though it was the most pleasant of all imaginable worlds. The people on the streets, bathed in late sunshine, seemed less tense and driven than usual. The girls in their summer dresses were provocative. But to Jericho, walking out onto Park Avenue, it was a dark world, full of pain. It was a world of instant emotional replay.

Moments, unrelated to tragedy, kept playing across the screen of his memory. Laura, her face bright with the excitement of living, sitting across the table from him in a little French restaurant they loved, arguing passionately about the right wine to go with a veal dish; Laura, her dark hair blowing around her face, standing with him high above the ocean on a cliff in Maine; Laura, lying beside him on clover-scented grass, staring happily up at a harvest moon. Laura, Laura, Laura. Laura, sick with fear, asking for help—*and not getting it*!

People turned to look at a giant red-bearded man pounding a huge fist against the stone front of a building. Asking for help—from him,

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Jericho—*and not getting it*!

Jericho had found himself in situations in the past when he wanted revenge, but it had always been revenge for someone else—to square accounts for someone else or some group of people. In those circumstances he operated coolly, his skills, his competences, his strength always in control. But for a long time, as he walked the streets, curdled by a bitter rage, he wanted revenge for himself. This thing had happened to him. He forgot, in his grief, that this thing had happened to Laura and David, not to him.

He had walked, criss-crossing the city for an hour or more, his body damp with sweat from the heat, internal and external, when he slowly began to be aware that anger and pain had deprived him of his professional senses. He had set something in motion back at Transocean. He must have frightened Elliot James out of his shoes, but that wasn't what it was all about. James would strike back and Jericho had already given him a lot of time in which to plan a move.

Jericho turned into a little bar on Eighth Avenue and ordered a beer. He was very thirsty. And while he sipped the beer he saw a familiar face at the far end of the room. It belonged to a thin pinch-faced man wearing dark glasses and studying a racing form. He tried to remember where he'd seen the face before, and suddenly realized it was not something out of the distant past. Half an hour ago he had jaywalked across a crowded avenue and come face to face with this pinch-faced man with the dark glasses as he reached the other side of the street. Half an hour of aimless walking later the same man was on the scene again.

It was like a splash of ice water in a dazed fighter's face. So, little man, you're on my tail! So we'll see how good you are.

Outdoors Jericho began to play a game with the pinch-faced man, making sudden turns into buildings, then waiting calmly for the little man to show. The man had completely blown his cover and he must know it. If he was any good at all he knew what Jericho was doing to him.

After an elaborate maneuver into a building and out through a fire exit Jericho lost him—or thought he'd lost him. But Jericho's instincts and perceptions were very sharp now. Just as he was feeling something like disappointment at having won, he noticed a large fat man constantly wiping his perspiring

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face with a handkerchief, a man wandering just as aimlessly as Jericho. So there were two men on him, and they were no longer being secretive about it. As he hurried round a corner, taking a mildly sadistic pleasure in making the fat man scurry, he almost barged into the little pinch-faced man who was studying the contents of a bookstore window.

Jericho began to put it together. He had told James to come to Jefferson Mews with an answer to his demand for a cut—of whatever. These men were watching him, waiting for him to head for home, making certain he wasn't setting a trap for Elliot James when he came with an answer or a counter-offer.

It wasn't until the twilight had passed and the street lights were on that Jericho headed directly for his home base. He took a taxi from midtown, aware that another taxi followed close on his heels. There was no way to hide the location of his studio even if he wanted to. It was listed in the phone book. There was no way for a six-foot-four-inch man with a flaming red beard to play hide-and-seek with people who know how to seek. He had invited James to his place and now it was time for him to be on hand to receive him.

The fat man with the handkerchief was half a block behind Jericho when he walked down Jefferson Mews to his apartment building. His studio window opened on the mews, and as he approached the building he saw that lights were on behind that window. Knowing the fat man was behind him, Jericho did not break stride. He walked to the building and straight through the vestibule into the ground-floor hall. Then he moved like lightning, straight to the back of the hall and under the stairway.

He waited, motionless, scarcely breathing. The fat man came in from the vestibule and stood at the foot of the stairway, looking up. He seemed to be listening for the sound of Jericho's footsteps, or perhaps the opening and closing of the studio door. He hesitated for a few moments, then lit a cigarette and walked out into the vestibule, possibly out onto the street again. He was apparently satisfied that Jericho had walked into whatever trap was waiting for him upstairs.

So Jericho walked right into it.

He came out from under the stairs and went up to the second floor. He stood outside the studio door, listening. There was no sound. He took out his key and unlocked the door as

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quietly as he could. He waited again for some sound, then he took a step back and charged the door, taking a rolling fall into the middle of the room.

Someone laughed.

He turned his head, already on the rise and ready. Leaning back in the corner of his couch was Miss Nan Martin, the glamorous receptionist from Transocean Travel.

"Do you always make your entrances so physical?" she asked. "Not that I didn't hope you were physical."

"What the hell are you doing here and how did you get in?" Jericho asked, getting to his feet.

"What I'm doing here must be fairly obvious," she said. "I'm afraid I told a fib in order to get in. Your janitor, or superintendent, or whatever you call him. Sicilian, isn't he? He has an eye for women. I was afraid if you didn't come soon he might insist on taking care of my spare time. He might be fun at that."

"Giovanni?"

"Nice name," Miss Martin said. "I told him I was a model and that I had an appointment to pose for you. He felt I shouldn't have to wait in the drafty hall, so he let me in. He even showed me where you kept some negligees for your models. I thought it might be coming on a little too strong to change into one of them. You have very good taste in women's things, by the way."

Jericho stood very still. He could feel the small hairs rising on the back of his neck. Every nerve in his body was screaming some kind of warning at him. But he smiled, a broad white smile.

"You came here because you were attracted to me?" he asked.

"Not many men with your kind of electricity walk into Transocean," the girl said.

Jericho reached out and turned off the light switch. The room went dark except for a faint reflection in the skylight from the street lamps outside. He took two steps forward to the couch. The girl laughed.

"No preliminaries?" she asked.

One big hand went over her mouth, and a knee pinned her to the couch.

"You came here to set me up," he whispered. "I've never slugged a woman in my life, but, baby, you're about to make history."

He hit her on the point of her lovely chin and her body went limp. He moved quickly away and into the corner shadows. He was watching the side window. Something darkened it, and then he saw a figure come

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quietly through it from the fire escape.

Jericho charged, hurling himself on the intruder with all his enormous strength. He felt a sharp pain at his shoulder and then he was slugging a helpless hulk into unconsciousness.

Someone was pounding on the front door.

"Jericho! Are you in there?"

Jericho recognized Lieutenant Christie's voice. He stepped across the body he was straddling and switched on the light. He touched his shoulder and his fingers came away red with his own blood. A few feet away from the man who was sprawled on the floor was a switchblade knife. It flashed across his mind that it could be the same knife that had killed Laura.

"Come in," he called out. "It's open."

Lieutenant Christie came into the room. Behind him were two uniformed cops and Mr. Elliot James, looking gray as parchment.

"The girl set me up, Andrew," Jericho said. "While I was supposed to be making love to her I was to get a knife in the back. That scum on the floor is probably one of the boys who did for Laura and David. Was Elliot-baby the other one? How did you get here?"

"Dull routine," Christie said. "Checking and double checking. And help from Mr. James."

"What kind of help? How did his foot slip?"

"So help me, Jericho, I had nothing to do with any of this," James said.

Jericho clutched his shoulder. It hurt.

"I checked the personnel files of Transocean," Christie said. "We believed something was wrong there, Johnny, didn't we? Miss Martin didn't quite check out. You haven't killed her, have you, man?"

"She was here to set me up for that creep on the fire escape. She'll come around." He looked at his bloodied fingers. "How didn't she check out, Andrew?"

"Her real name is Annette Martine. She is the daughter of Mike Martine. Mean anything to you?"

"Syndicate boss. Drugs. Smuggling. You name it," Jericho said.

"Two and two," Christie said. "A travel agency with all its foreign connections could be a valuable asset to an importer of drugs and other contraband. Your lady friend was the queen of the operation. It will take a while to put it together, but I think David Power caught on somehow. They told him what would happen if he didn't keep

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his mouth shut and play along."

"Laura?"

Christie nodded. "That's why David was trying to get her to leave the country. He was afraid to tell her why. They were being watched. We picked up a couple of Martine's boys outside who must have been following you. They saw you go to the Power apartment and decided he'd spilled the beans to you. You helped convince them by offering to make a deal with Mr. James, who didn't know what the hell you were talking about. But Miss Martin knew. Office communicator always kept open. She knew everything that went on in the partners' offices." Christie smiled. "If you'd been more interested in her charms *she* might have offered to make a deal with you. You have a thing with women, Johnny.

"Get them out of here!" Jericho roared. He turned away, thinking of Laura. She had been worth a thousand, a hundred thousand creeps like these. There was no way to get even for her.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Sir John Appleby story by

MICHAEL INNES

first publication in the United States

As a relief from his high-pressure duties at Scotland Yard, Sir John Appleby tackled what appeared to be a lighthearted little case involving Aunt Jessica's poltergeist . . . and the happy result is a fine example of suave and sophisticated English crime-writing . . .

A MATTER OF DISTURBING INCIDENTS

by MICHAEL INNES

"Aunt Jessica has a poltergeist," Judith Appleby said, as she watched her husband pour drinks. Sir John had got home from Scotland Yard after a hard day. High-powered criminals were very much abroad in the land, and he had conferred at length with half a dozen of his senior officers about one large-scale villainy or another. He deserved to be entertained with a little relaxing family gossip.

"In that case your aunt had better keep a sharp eye on the new kitchen maid." Appleby handed Judith her sherry. "Better ring her up and tell her so."

"There isn't a new kitchen maid. In fact, kitchen maids are no longer heard of."

"In the kind of household your Aunt Jessica runs I'll bet they are, although there may be a new name for them. In any event, what the old lady must look out for is an adolescent girl, preferably of worse than indifferent education and necessarily of hysterical temperament. If poltergeists exist, it's almost invariably when some such young person is around

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that they get busy toppling the furniture and chucking the china about the house. If they don't exist, one has to conclude that dotty girls can develop surprising skill in putting on such turns themselves. The subject is a perplexing one. Parapsychologists are by no means in agreement about it."

"Isn't that because there's often such a mixup of straight fraud and genuinely inexplicable happenings?" Judith felt she was at least getting John's mind off bank robberies and muggings. "For instance, a man finds he can make billiard balls roll about the table simply by glaring at them. Then he is investigated by professors and people who turn out to be an unsympathetic crowd. His powers begin to desert him in these new conditions, and soon he is doing it with magnets or something hidden up his shirt sleeves."

"I've never heard of the billiard-balls man."

"No more have I. I've made him up. But that sort of thing."

"I agree there have been plenty of such cases. The ladies known as physical mediums are the best documented of them. But it's more interesting when the thing operates the other way round. The professional stage illusionist makes a few passes, mutters some abracadabra, and the pretty girl in the box vanishes. It's done too often and the girl *really* vanishes, never to be seen or heard of again."

"I've never heard of *that*, John."

"Of course not. I've made it up. And now tell me more about your poor aunt's predicament. I hope the manifestations are confined to the kitchen."

"They're not. The poltergeist has managed to smash a white porcelain dish of the Liao dynasty. And that, you know, means a hundred years before the Norman Conquest."

"Good God!" Appleby was genuinely shocked. "Anything else of that order?"

"An eight-faceted vase of *mei-p'ing* shape. Underglaze blue with dragons in waves."

"That would be Yüan — and I think I remember it. This must be stopped. Has the old lady called in the police?"

"She called in the vicar, and the vicar produced an ecclesiastical exorcist, specially licensed for the job by the Archbishop of Canterbury. There's been bell-book-and-candle stuff all over Anderton Place. But the poltergeist hasn't been incommoded so far."

"Then the good Lady Parmiter must be persuaded to try the local constabulary after all

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— and just as a last resort." Appleby, far from amused, frowned at his untouched sherry. "It's monstrous, Judith. A vast great country house absolutely crammed with treasures waiting to be smashed to bits by some unfortunate child of disordered mind! And nothing done about it, you say, except in terms of clerical mumbo-jumbo? The old dear ought to be locked up."

"Don't be so cockily rationalistic, John. Of course you're right about the treasures. Acres and acres of the things. But acres and acres of utter junk as well. Aunt Jessica's late husband was enormously wealthy. As a collector he was also as guileless and tasteless as they come. The result is that Anderton Place must be unique among the dwellings of men."

"But does your aunt *know*? What's genuine and what's fake, and so on?"

"It's impossible to tell, but she certainly likes living with the old higgledy-piggledy effect perpetrated by my uncle. Loyalty to the deceased, perhaps. Her trustees must have accurate inventories based on adequate expertises made by museum people and so forth. The insurance position would be chaotic without that. But Anderton Place itself *is* chaotic, as you've seen for yourself."

"Not so chaotic as it will be when this precious poltergeist is finished with it."

"That's how it looks, I must say." Judith Appleby glanced at her husband with caution, and confirmed her view that he had been working far too hard. There were even dark rings under his eyes. "Yes," she said. "And you're quite right. It *ought* to be stopped. Why don't you stop it?"

"What's that?"

"Aunt Jessica has a high regard for you—"

"Judith, are you suggesting that I take time off to run this blessed poltergeist to earth? The idea's absurd."

"You said yourself she ought to call in the police. And since there's a policeman in the family—"

"More sherry? It's almost dinner time."

"John, dear, don't be evasive. And think of all that stuff. Sung and T'ang and heaven knows what. And only poor old Aunt—"

"Poor old fiddlesticks! Your precious aunt is as formidable a dowager as any of her kind in England."

"Don't you feel you could handle her?"

"Of course I could handle her." As he uttered this boast Appleby caught his wife's

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eye and grinned. "Oh, very well," he said. And he reached for the telephone beside him. "I'll cancel things," he said. "Just for tomorrow, mind you. I can't play truant for longer than that."

"The poltergeist may not last even that long with *you* on the job, darling."

And with this very proper expression of confidence uttered, Judith Appleby went to see about the dinner.

It is well known that poltergeists, in common with other agents of the supernatural, frequently sulk when attracting the interest of persons skeptically inclined. Aunt Jessica's poltergeist may have regarded the Applebys not as skeptical but merely as open-minded; certainly it lost no time in showing that it remained in business.

Appleby hadn't finished his polite inquiries about Lady Parmiter's health — indeed the butler who had announced the visitors hadn't yet left the drawing room — when the unmistakable sound of breaking china announced the poltergeist's presence. From a high unglazed shelf crowded with stuff a medium-sized jar had tumbled to the parquet floor and exploded like a fragmentation bomb.

Appleby strode over to the resulting small disaster and picked up a couple of the larger pieces. Although scarcely an expert on Oriental ceramics, he had no difficulty in identifying what had been destroyed. The Parmiter Collection — so enormous and so eccentrically miscellaneous — was the poorer by one of those nicely manufactured pots in which one buys preserved ginger at rather superior shops.

"Sometimes T'ang and sometimes Fortnum and Mason," he said rather grimly to Aunt Jessica. "Your visitant must certainly be described as having catholic tastes."

"As my dear husband himself had." Aunt Jessica produced this odd rejoinder with dignity. She certainly wasn't at all an easy old lady.

"Yes, of course." Appleby spoke absently. Taking the freedom of a fairly close relative, he had scrambled on a chair and was investigating the shelf from which the jar had fallen. It stood close to a high window of which the upper sash was open. Nobody had been looking that way when the thing happened. Beyond this, there was nothing to be seen.

He got down, collected a brush and shovel from the fireplace, composedly swept up the bits and pieces, and deposited

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them in a wastepaper basket. Performing this more or less menial action appeared to put something further in his head. "How many indoor servants have you got at present?" he asked.

"Fewer, certainly, than some years ago." For a moment Lady Parmiter seemed to feel that this was as precise a computation as she could fairly be expected to arrive at. But then she tried harder. "Seven," she said. "Or eight? No more than that."

"I suppose you can just manage," Judith said without irony. Unlike her husband, she had been accustomed to large establishments in youth. "I take it they are all reliable and have been with you for a good many years?"

"I fear not. The minds of domestic servants, Judith, are undeniably unsettled. I sometimes judge, too, that a nomadic habit is establishing itself among them. Their faces are frequently unfamiliar to me, so I think they must come and go. My housekeeper, Mrs. Thimble, would tell you about that. I don't, of course, include Mrs. Thimble in the eight. She is almost a companion to me in her humble way. Unfortunately she is absent for a few days, owing to some bereavement in her family."

Appleby had betrayed some impatience during these unhelpful remarks, and had received a warning glance from Judith. Now he tried again.

"I know," he said, "that you don't much care for the police. But you might—"

He broke off, having been interrupted by a series of bumps and shudders, followed by a splintering crash, apparently from just outside the drawing room. He ran to the door and threw it open. Anderton Place rejoiced in a very grand marble-sheathed hall and a correspondingly imposing marble staircase.

The hall was now littered with the debris of an enormous wardrobe. Minor bits and pieces — the first to detach themselves from the tumbling monster — lay here and there on the stairs. The bizarre effect was enhanced by the fact that the wardrobe had apparently contained a large collection of Victorian and Edwardian clothing. This, too, now lay all over the place.

"I was about to remark," Appleby said calmly when the startled ladies had joined him, "that two courses are possible. You might, Aunt Jessica, call in one of the big security firms. They would send you a few skilled people, in the guise of accountants or solicitors' clerks

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or indigent clergy deserving a country holiday—"

"Quite out of the question." Lady Parmiter made no bones about this. "I should regard anything of the sort as most objectionable."

"Alternatively, there are highly reputable bodies devoted to the pursuit of psychical research. Archbishops and Prime Ministers have been among their active members from time to time. Their attitude is totally objective and disinterested, just as is that of any other learned society. They possess great experience alike in assessing the significance of genuine paranormal phenomena and in detecting imposture. If you cared—"

"I will have nothing to do with anything of the sort, John. Dear Adolphus would not have approved of it. Judith, is that not so?"

"Yes, Aunt Jessica, I suppose it is. But then Uncle Adolphus was never up against a peculiarly destructive poltergeist."

"There is the luncheon bell, my dear. Your uncle always liked an old-fashioned bell. I have had to instruct this new butler — whose name escapes me — to refrain from entering and announcing meals. And that reminds me. We shall not discuss these disturbing incidents before the servants. I hope the man has remembered the Andron-Blanquet. I recall it, John, as your favorite claret. Malign spirits may be at work, but at least they have made no attack on the wine cellar."

And Lady Parmiter, a spirited woman, led the way to her dining room.

The meal was uneventful. Spoons and forks didn't tie themselves into knots or take to the air and vanish. The only mishap was a minor one, when a young parlormaid contrived to spill an uncomfortably hot potato into Judith's lap. Appleby found himself giving an eye to this girl. If she was a professional, it didn't seem to be at waiting at table.

And to his trained sense her relationship to the anonymous butler was detectably odd. This might be taken to count against the view that she was the standard hysterical female of canonical poltergeist literature. Appleby rose from table with a dim theory stirring in his mind.

Then — again claiming family status — he took a prowl through Anderton Place alone. Even more than he remembered, it was a mad museum from cellars to attics. In the cellars there was plenty of that sound and modest claret; there was even more claret that was very rare indeed; there was also

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a bewildering amount of wine for which the late Lord Parmiter must have scoured every fifth-rate wine shop in the country.

The attics were full of rubbish — some of it honest-to-goodness rubbish, and some of it fake furniture of the most pretentious sort. But every now and then one came on something which would have satisfied the most exacting taste in the age of Louis Quatorze. The effect was a kind of security nightmare. It cried out for skilled pillage.

And so with the rest of the house. As the crazy Lord Parmiter had originally disposed everything, so was everything disposed now. It would take the entire staff of the British Museum a month's labor, one felt, to separate the wheat from the chaff.

There were several further "disturbing incidents" (as Aunt Jessica had termed them) while Appleby prowled. At one point a worthless but lethal bracket clock hurtled past Appleby's ear and smashed into a cabinet containing some decidedly precious Dresden china. The whole affair was clearly mounting to a crisis.

Back in the drawing room Appleby found that Judith had been trying to persuade her aunt to take drastic emergency action. She ought to send her entire staff away on board-wages, shut up the house, and leave merely a thoroughly reliable caretaker in charge. Appleby didn't think much of this plan. Nor — more conclusively — did Lady Parmiter. If the poltergeist really was a poltergeist (and on this she, too, professed an open mind) the result might merely be major disaster. More poltergeists might simply move in, and the last state of Anderton be worse than its first.

Appleby agreed, or professed to agree. He had an alternative suggestion. The most experienced packers in London should be hastily brought in. Working under Lady Parmiter's direction, they could crate up everything of the first value for immediate removal to impregnable strongrooms in the metropolis. Poltergeists were invariably confined to one stamping ground. They wouldn't be able to follow.

Lady Parmiter turned this down too—but with a shift of ground. Such a proceeding would be abhorrent to the shade of dear Adolphus and was therefore not to be entertained for a moment. It seemed an impasse. Appleby produced what seemed to be a final throw.

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"But doesn't Anderton run to something like a strongroom of its own?" he asked. "I seem to remember Judith's uncle speaking of something of the kind, and being rather proud of it."

"We simply call it the safe, John, but it is in fact a large room and entirely burglarproof. I always lock my dear mother's Queen Anne silver away in it when I have occasion to leave Anderton."

"That's very prudent of you." Appleby was wondering if he could possibly bring this perverse old person to see reason. At least he mustn't give up without a further attempt. "May I see it?" he asked. "Your husband was extremely wise to have such a room constructed. No great house should be without one."

The request, thus framed, was well received. The Anderton strongroom looked tremendously impressive—and had looked that way for at least 50 years. Indeed, it might have been some triumph of metallurgical skill triumphantly displayed at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851. If Appleby was amused at this outmoded affair he managed not to betray the fact.

"Look," he said, "couldn't we simply put everything that is really valuable in here? I'm sure Lord Parmiter would have approved. We have on our hands just the sort of situation he must have been envisaging when he ordered so spacious an affair. If what we're up against is simple human vandalism or madness, then we defeat it in this simple way. If it's something supernatural, we're at least no worse off than we are at present.

"Of course you're the only person who knows what's what, who can quickly pick out the really precious things from those which are to be classed as primarily of sentimental value. I honestly feel you should do this, Aunt Jessica. It's your duty as the guardian of all the marvelous things Lord Parmiter gathered together. And it can all be done this afternoon. You show us what, and the whole household can help with the stowing."

Perhaps surprisingly, Lady Parmiter agreed to this plan at once. The undisturbed disposition of things at Anderton was very dear to her as one of the pieties of widowhood. She was a good Victorian, after all, and the impulse was the same as that which had prompted a more famous Widow to preserve intact the arrangements on her deceased Prince Consort's writing table.

On the other hand, she had a shrewd sense of what things

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were worth, and no reason to believe that dear Adolphus would have smiled on the indiscriminate massacre of his wildly heterogeneous treasures.

The task was accomplished by a late dinnertime, the bewildered servants having been directed (in the absence of the bereaved Mrs. Thimble) by the butler without a name. Anderton didn't look that denuded when the job was finished. All the same, objects worth many hundreds of thousands of pounds had been segregated and placed under lock and key. The poltergeist was thwarted —or so it was to be hoped.

The Applebys drove back to London in the dark, but not before Appleby himself had contrived a short private conversation with Lady Parmiter.

"Lucky your aunt turned out to know the stuff fairly well," he said to Judith on the way home.

"Yes."

"I doubt whether much that's really first-rate now remains outside that strongroom."

"I suppose not."

"You'd agree, Judith, that Aunt Jessica has been persuaded to do the rational thing?"

"Clearly she has—unless it really is a supernatural agency that's at work."

"You'd also agree that what she has done is the *obvious* thing in the circumstances?"

"Well, yes. But I don't see—"

"The *predictable* thing?" It was almost with anxiety that Appleby appeared to wait for his wife's acquiescence this time.

"Absolutely."

"Then I think all's well. Yes, I'm pretty sure of it. By the way, just give a glance at the spare bedroom tomorrow. Your aunt's coming to stay with us."

"To stay with us!"

"Oh, not for long. Just for two or three days. She's telling that butler tonight that she's coming to us in the morning."

"How very odd! But at least we can get a good night's sleep first."

"Very true. Just one telephone call, and I'll be ready for it."

"A telephone call?"

"To the Thames Valley Constabulary, my dear. Anderton is in their territory, so I must liaise with them, as people now say." And Appleby laughed softly as he swung the steering wheel. "You see, I set the trap. But they spring it."

"All caught," Appleby announced a couple of mornings later. "Butler, phony parlormaid—"

"I recall remarking," Lady

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Parmiter said, "that servants tend to be rather unreliable nowadays."

"Quite so—in fact, two more were in the pay of the gang. All small fry, of course, the butler included. Fortunately their bosses decided to be in at the kill. Our Thames Valley friends nicked the lot while they were happily treating your strong-room, Aunt Jessica, like a hunk of old cheese."

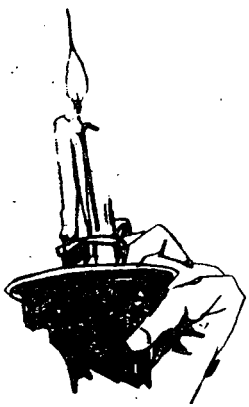
"We had really done quite a lot of their work for them?" Judith asked.

"Just that. Exactly the point. They count as top-ranking villains, but happen not to be all that clued in on the fine-art front. By themselves they could only have made a purely random haul. Hence the poltergeist, who made us work like mad doing all the sifting for them—separating the wheat from the chaff."

"But, John, what about the tumbling jar? That *did* look like the real thing."

"Not to me. A little bladder at the end of a long tube passing through the window. Squeeze a bulb at the other end, and the trick's accomplished. You just pull the tube out through the window again, and there you are. Literally a trick. Every kid's conjuring set includes a miniature version of the same thing."

"I must go upstairs and pack at once." Aunt Jessica announced this firmly. "It would be the wish of dear Adolphus that the *status quo ante* at Anderton be restored forthwith. And Mrs. Thimble must find me a new butler. His first task, my dear John, will be to pack up every bottle of Andron-Blanquet I still possess. And I needn't tell you where it will be dispatched to."



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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

The touching and revealing story of two people—the owner of a bookstore and a dirty homeless dropout of a boy . . . and of "the only real mystery of life, which is the mystery of why and how things happen as they do. And this thought was like the delicate quivering of the web that first alerts the innocent ego to the artful designs of the spider-wiled subconscious" . . .

THE INTRICATE PATTERN

by DONALD OLSON

Myrna greeted him with one of those peck-like salutations which only vaguely resemble kisses. "You're late," she said.

"Last minute customer." It was his only reference to the boy.

"Have a good day?"

He could have pinpointed the second when she would ask this, and thereupon he would give her the sales figure for the day and would relate bits of gossip. "Mrs. Antonucci came in, terribly excited. She's had another message from Outer Space. There's going to be a momentous Cosmic Discovery that's going to change all our concepts about the universe. But we mustn't be afraid, she said. It's going to change our lives drastically, but it'll be to our benefit."

And he would dry the dishes for her and they would watch Walter Cronkite and the news and would settle down, he on the sofa, she in the swivel rocker, and they would read advance copies of the new books and presently, yawning, he would get up and move toward the door and she would ask him where he was going and he would answer, "Just outside to check on the weather."

It was the way they communicated—ritual phrases, with smiling glances that didn't quite meet.

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Outside he would look at the stars and wish for impossible things.

It wasn't that he disliked the bookstore. After 20 years in the insurance company office it was in many ways a perpetual vacation. He liked books, and by and large the customers were agreeable enough, and yet it was far from the ideal life of which he'd always vaguely but persistently dreamed; it was not the freedom he'd always wanted, though what he meant by freedom he couldn't have said, aside from knowing it was not mere comfort.

At times he thought freedom might be adventure; at other times, peace of mind. Had it been some concrete ambition he would likely have attained it by now, at 38, but it was more a thing of the spirit—one of those hankerings which do not age with the body but rather intensify with the shrinkage of time, as the mind begins to realize there is no longer a limitless future in which to discover the heart's desires.

Often of late he thought that what he truly wanted was his *own* life, not somebody else's, for at times he actually felt he was living a life designed and intended for someone else, and this evoked obscure feelings of guilt, secret yearnings to be punished in some way for the things he had. His life, however, seemed as charmed as it was false. For years he'd saved his money and invested it indifferently, scarcely caring if these investments were sound or foolish, as if it were an enemy's property he was disposing of, or a stranger's. Still, in spite of this, he was left with more gains than losses.

The bookstore turned out to be as confining as the insurance company office. It did not represent freedom, only independence, and the cry still sounded in his heart.

The boy had come in one day just as Edward was closing up. He was slim and blond and had a pug-nosed, blue-eyed Huckleberry Finn face. He wore a ragged blue sweat shirt and shorts made from a pair of jeans. His feet were huge and bare and remarkably dirty, and silver-colored chains around his right ankle had left a greenish brown ring on his skin.

Edward was about to tell him the store was closing when the boy lunged toward one of the racks of paperbacks. "Hey, you've got it! *Born Free*!"

Clumsy brown fingers fished into pockets so frantically the cloth ripped, but came out of each pocket with nothing. He looked sheepishly at Edward. "I guess I forgot my money. Okay

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if I pay you tomorrow?"

Edward looked into the boy's strange blue eyes. Saying it perhaps because he was tired or because he felt a flash of envy for the boy's youth and spirits, and hating himself for saying it, he said, "It'll still be here tomorrow."

"I'll come earlier tomorrow," the boy said, unoffended. He looked around. "I never even knew this place was here."

On the way home Edward drove out into the country along a road from which you could see far off into a deep purple-misted valley glade. The air was dry and cool and smelled of pine. More urgently than ever before, he was touched by that poignant and mysterious sense of something drifting irretrievably out of his reach.

The boy came back the next day, but again he had no money and this time he stood silently beside the rack with his nose in *Born Free*.

"If you want to read it but not own it I'm sure the library must have a copy," Edward felt impelled to remark.

"That's okay," said the boy, one of those teen-age put-off replies which Edward found unanswerable.

He must have been an exceedingly slow reader, Edward decided, because he came back every day at three o'clock and stood there deeply absorbed in the same book. By then, however, Edward was curiously intrigued by the boy—he wasn't as annoyed as he ordinarily would have been by an habitual nonbuying browser; and he actually began to look forward to seeing him every day. He learned that his name was Tom Rodack and that he went to the high school, or said he did, although none of the other high-school students who stopped at the store ever spoke to him or appeared to recognize him.

Edward assumed that once the boy had finished *Born Free* he would not return, but by then he had discovered *Living Free* and *Forever Free*—thanks to Edward's pointing them out.

Occasionally, as the weeks went by, Edward gave him simple duties to perform, such as dusting the books and washing the windows. But there was a reckless clumsiness about the boy; his attention span was limited, and his enthusiasm, though quickly sparked, was of short duration.

Nevertheless, the hours when Rodack was not there began to seem empty to Edward, and when the boy did show up, a certain oppressiveness lifted from Edward's heart and the lines of his mouth became less rigid.

Like most complex people

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Edward was seldom bored by candor and simplicity, when they were genuine, as Rodack's were. That may have been why he tolerated Rodack's presence, or it may have been that he was grieved to think of that wild blue light being extinguished from Rodack's eyes, of the tiresome obligations of life crippling the pride of that stalwart body. The boy was all instinct, all feeling, with a lopsided nature that would make life a never-ending struggle.

One morning Edward got the shock of his life when he arrived at the store at his usual time, 8:45, unlocked the door, switched on the lights, and walked into the back room, where he found Rodack asleep in the wicker lounge chair.

Edward knew he should have been angry; in fact, he was angry at first, but still he didn't choose to awaken the boy, finding something touching about the vulnerability of his sleeping face. And by the time Rodack awoke, Edward's anger had changed to perplexity.

"Easy," grinned Roadack, when Edward asked him how he'd got in. "I sticky-fingered your key one day and had a duplicate made."

"But, Tom, you had no right to do that."

"But, gee, you might get sick some day or something and want me to open up for you."

"What time did you get here this morning?"

"Came in last night."

"You've been here all night?"

"Sure."

"But your folks must be worried about you."

"They're dead."

Edward had studiously avoided ever asking Rodack any personal questions. Knowledge seemed always to confer a kind of obligation, which Edward wished to avoid.

"Then whom do you live with?"

"I kind of move around."

Rodack was in and out of the store all day; he seemed unusually eager to please Edward, to do odd jobs and run errands, and that afternoon when it came time to close he said he he would lock the door when he left.

"Well, it's closing time right now," Edward said, turning off the lights.

"Can't I hang around for a while?"

Edward looked at him. "What for?"

"You know that creep who came in and tried to sell you his watch? I didn't like the way he kept looking at the cash register."

"You know I don't leave money in the register overnight."

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"Yeah, but he might not know it. I better stay here and keep watch. You know, just in case."

Edward surprised himself by not objecting. He knew it was wrong, knew that Rodack simply wanted to stay the night, yet he hadn't the heart to refuse.

The following morning Rodack was gone when Edward got to the store, but in the back room he found an army blanket and two empty boxes of animal crackers.

All this time he had said nothing to Myrna about Rodack, although it would be on the tip of his tongue to relate some especially amusing bit of nonsense the boy had come out with; but then he would stop, for some reason unwilling to have Myrna know anything about the boy. It was inevitable, of course, that sooner or later Myrna and the boy would meet, considering how much time Rodack spent at the store.

As it happened, an epidemic of Asian flu spread through the town. Edward caught it, and one morning he was too sick to go to work. That night Myrna came home, fixed his supper on a tray, and brought it up to him with the evening paper.

"Darling," she said, tucking the napkin under his chin without looking into his eyes, "the horridest boy came into the store today. I had the dickens of a time getting rid of him. He *said* he was a friend of yours."

"Tom Rodack," said Edward laconically, sipping his tomato juice.

"He reeked of perspiration. I could still smell him after he'd gone. Doesn't he have a mother?"

"I suppose so," he lied.

"Well, she ought to make him get a haircut and get some decent clothes. He talked as if you two were great pals. Does he come in often?"

"Rather, yes."

"You shouldn't let people like that hang around. Mrs. Wilcox and her daughter came in. You should have seen the looks they gave him. I finally had to tell him to leave if he wasn't going to buy anything."

Edward looked at her coldly. "You shouldn't have done that."

She laid a hand on his hot forehead. "Before you know it he'll be bringing all his friends. Kids are always looking for a new hangout."

"He hasn't any friends."

"Well, if he thinks you're his friend couldn't you tactfully suggest he take a bath more often?"

Edward smiled to himself. Rodack was scornful of such concessions to civilization, and

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Edward secretly admired him for it. Life was, after all, a record of such concessions, and with each one the individual sacrifices some essential part of himself; for each concession exacts a price until one is bereft of all the wild free impulses of his nature and becomes a plodding creature of motive, his body shaved and scented and clothed according to the dictates of fashion, his mind furnished with the proper attitudes of the day.

Suddenly, lying there in bed, he knew what he meant by freedom, that elusive abstraction that sounded on the lips like the soaring flight of some great white bird: freedom was the courage not to make concessions.

One evening shortly after, Edward lay watching a movie on television; he seldom read any more. Myrna sat with a book by the window. About eight o'clock she stood up and looked out into the street.

"Edward, come here."

"What is it?"

"He's standing out there on the corner, under the streetlight."

"Who is?"

"That boy!"

Edward felt a strange excitement. He didn't look away from the screen. "What boy?"

"Your *friend*. The kid who came in that day you were home sick."

"Can't be."

"Come here and look."

"He doesn't even know where we live."

"Well, come here and look, can't you?"

Edward got up slowly and stood beside her, looking out.

"Well, it's him, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He doesn't even have a jacket on. Just that ragged filthy sweat shirt. He must be insane. He'll catch pneumonia."

"I'd better tell him to come in."

She clutched his sleeve. "No. Don't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I'd just rather you didn't."

For a moment he really hated her. "You'd rather he stood out there and caught pneumonia?"

"He ought to have his head examined."

"I'm going to have him come in and I'll give him one of my jackets."

"Can't you just take it out to him?"

But Edward didn't go out. How could he have explained to Rodack why he couldn't invite him into the house?

Rodack said nothing to Edward the following day about his standing outside the house;

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Edward said nothing to the boy. But something did happen that day, a revelation that added an element of deep pathos to Edward's feelings about Rodack. It was inventory time and Edward put the boy to work reading off titles to him from the shelves. Rodack said he didn't want to do it.

"It's silly," he objected.

"Silly or not, it has to be done."

"But, heck, you can see what books are here. You know where every single book in this place is. So why do you want to write them down?"

"That isn't the point." And he tried to explain the purpose of the inventory.

"I'll wash the windows instead. Or let me dust the shelves."

This puzzled Edward, for he knew how much Rodack really disliked those chores. "The windows are okay, and the shelves don't need dusting."

"Then I guess I can't help you."

Neither insolence nor defiance characterized this remark, but a curious sort of resignation touched with sadness, and it alerted Edward to something happening behind the boy's placid inscrutable face.

"If you're going to hang around here, Tom, you've got to help out when I need you."

Rodack looked gravely down at his toes. "I wouldn't be much help with the inventory. I can't read."

At first Edward thought he was being funny, and then he realized he was in dead earnest. The grin faded from Edward's face. "What about *Born Free*—and *Living Free*—and *Forever Free*?"

"I saw the movie of *Born Free*. You told me what the others were. I wouldn't have known."

All those hours, standing there with his nose in those books, staring at them, pretending to read them. Why? *Why?* The prodigious injustice of it all struck Edward like a dizzying blow. Had no one cared enough to teach him?

"They tried," Rodack admitted. "Something was wrong. I just couldn't hack it."

"But they have special kinds of instruction these days."

"Not where I come from."

"Tom, where *did* you come from? You've never told me."

Rodack looked sly, mysterious. "Heck of a long ways from here. Don't ask me 'cause I ain't ever goin' back."

Edward kept thinking of all those hours when Rodack had wandered among the rows and racks of books, touching them, staring at them, thumbing slowly through them, and al-

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ways, he now realized, with a look of baffled wonder that Edward had mistaken for enchantment. While all the time the real enchantment was denied to him. And Edward had thought Rodack was free!

For the first time in his life Edward felt the stirring of a cause within his soul, the first inkling of a positive ambition.

"Would you like to know how to read, Tom?" Edward asked quietly.

"What's the use? I can't."

"Oh, yes, you can. I'm sure you can."

Nothing else was important, not really, after that. Only the lessons. Edward was the soul of patience, the ideal instructor, for he was truly inspired. And now he would deal curtly and perfunctorily with anyone who came into the store. If someone asked for a certain book he would often say no, they didn't have it, rather than take the time to check or find it; and sometimes, if the interruptions were so numerous they still didn't have time to complete the daily lesson, he would pull down the shade and turn out the front lights as much as an hour or two early.

Meanwhile his own paperwork suffered. It had always been his practice to type up special orders the same day they were received, so that his customers could be assured of two- or three-week delivery. Now he was letting these orders pile up, and the larger the stack grew the less inclined he felt to tackle the chore of typing them up. Complaints began to mount, orders were canceled, and business began noticeably to fall off.

"It beats me," said Myrna, balancing up at the end of the month. "Business isn't half of what it was last year. What do you think is wrong?"

Edward shrugged. "Don't forget, they warned us the retail book business was an interesting way to make very little money."

"I can't say you're even showing much interest lately."

Edward said nothing. She persisted. "Is it beginning to bore you, darling? Is that it?"

This he denied, but without conviction. She said nothing more until later, over dessert. "Edward, I've been thinking. I know we had an agreement. You would run the store, I would run the house and keep the accounts. But I'm left with so much time on my hands. Why not let me take care of the store for two or three days a week, or in the afternoons? You wouldn't feel so confined."

"Have I complained?"

"Not exactly."

He felt she was being dishon-

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est. "Are *you* complaining?"

She regarded him with mild impatience. "I'm not complaining about a thing. But I'm smart enough to know that something's wrong. Let's face it, figures don't lie. The business is in trouble. Serious trouble."

"And you think it's my fault."

"I'm suggesting it may be mine. I'm quite willing to shoulder more of the burden."

In fact, she developed the unnerving habit after that of dropping into the store on frequent and unexpected occasions, quite like some sort of inspector, and Edward's resentment was magnified because of her uncanny ability to pop in at the most inopportune moments.

"But you never *told* me, Edward," she scolded. "You're obviously encouraging that kid to hang around."

"My God, Myrna, haven't you heard a word I've said? This boy is eighteen years old and can't *read*."

"But, darling, that's not your fault. We're running a bookstore, not a remedial reading clinic."

He didn't quite know how to explain to Myrna that for the first time in his life he felt that he was doing *his* thing, not somebody else's. Perhaps freedom, in its purest sense, meant service, a heretofore untraveled road by which he might resume his long-stalled journey toward fulfillment.

The experience of helping someone who so desperately needed help proved a heady and self-nourishing sensation, especially when his efforts met with far greater success than he had dared hope. Where professionals had failed, he was succeeding, and once he had overcome Rodack's conditioned-by-failure apathy the boy forged ahead with remarkable speed.

Myrna was the only obstacle, and it soon became clear to Edward that she was jealous of Rodack, intensely jealous, and when he would summon all the patience he could muster to prove to her how foolish this was she would merely get angry and rave all the more violently.

"I guess it was a bad idea after all," she finally declared. "The bookstore, I mean. It's losing money—*my* money, I don't have to remind you—and you're running it deeper into the ground every day. I think it's time we bailed out."

He looked at her, astonished. "You mean—sell?"

"Yes, sell. Only an idiot throws good money after bad."

Rodack was aware of all this tension—Myrna left *him* in no doubt at all of how she felt about his presence in the store; but he couldn't believe, any

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more than Edward could, that she was serious about selling out. He had begun now to sample all the riches of the written word and the experience wrought a swift and amazing change in the boy's personality: it opened him up and healed the budding neurosis that had made him so jumpy and cantakerous, and he even began to take more pride in his appearance.

Edward told him there was no reason now why he couldn't get himself a good job. "And you'll be able to find yourself a room." Now that he could read, Rodack had seemed to find the bookstore the perfect place to live.

"Can't I just bunk in here like I've been doing—till you sell the place, I mean?"

Edward agreed that he could, and Rodack looked absurdly grateful.

"I'm going to repay you, you know. For all you've done for me. No one's ever been this good to me."

"You don't owe me a thing, Tom."

"Oh, yes I do. And I'm going to pay you back. Some way."

Meanwhile Edward had been giving a great deal of thought to what had happened, and it occurred to him that there must be hundreds of people in the same fix as Rodack—people with serious reading difficulties who might respond to the same sort of unconventional therapy. Perhaps the bookstore could even be converted into a remedial reading clinic. The idea excited him.

"But that would take money," he confided to Tom. "Even if Myrna would agree. Which she won't."

Myrna, in fact, thought of nothing but selling the store, the sooner the better, and Edward was disconcerted by the swiftness with which she came up with a prospective buyer—a couple of retired schoolteachers with some money saved and a desire for a respectable small business of their own. Edward could see they were serious about wanting the store, and when it was proposed that the two ladies spend an entire day or two there to get an idea of the clientele and amount of business transacted on an average day, Edward had no choice but to comply.

"And listen to me, Edward," Myrna made it clear. "I want that *boy* out of there. I don't want him sticking his nose in the door while the ladies are there. I don't want him within a *mile* of the place. Otherwise I'm calling the police and having him arrested for trespassing."

Edward tried as tactfully as

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possible to explain this to Rodack, who wasn't the least abashed.

"That's okay, Ed. There's something I've got to do anyway."

"Don't be silly. I said you didn't owe me a thing."

"Yes, I do. It's funny, you know. It seems to me now that I was meant to come in here that first day. I mean, gosh, think of all the places I could have gone that day! And yet I came in here. I mean, *why*? Unless I was meant to. I think you were the one person in the world who could help me."

For some mysterious reason this little speech of Rodack's filled Edward with a secret and extraordinary satisfaction, as if he'd been given a glimpse of the intricate pattern of his life and how innumerable unrelated events had been interwoven to form this pattern; and he thought with wonder and awe about the only real mystery of life, which is the mystery of why and how things happen as they do. And this thought was like the delicate quivering of the web that first alerts the innocent ego to the artful designs of the spider-wiled subconscious.

Still, this did not keep him from hoping that business would be so bad on the day the prospective buyers were present that they would immediately lose interest.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. It seemed, on the contrary, that every customer the store ever had had suddenly and perversely taken it into his head to buy a book or stationery or a greeting card or *something*. Edward could tell from the delight on the ladies' faces that their minds were now firmly made up: they would buy the business.

He went home later than usual that night, having stopped off at a bar for a couple of drinks, which was something he had never done before. Never.

When he did get home and found the house dark, the degree of his surprise was affected by the slight intoxication of his senses, and it must be assumed that this was why he felt neither alarm nor apprehension. He let himself in. No aroma of cooking food, no clatter of dishes and silverware from the kitchen. Only a pervasive silence. He went from room to room looking for Myrna and never paused to wonder why he did not even once call out her name.

He found her in the bathroom, but she was not taking a bath. Her head was totally submerged in the tub.

Apparently she had slipped while getting out of the bathtub

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and fallen back, striking her head on the end of the tub, becoming unconscious, and sliding under the water. The police asked a number of routine questions and took the trouble of confirming with the two ladies that he had been in the store all day. The doors of the house had been locked; there was no reason to believe that Myrna's death was anything but an accident.

Still, Rodack's candor the following day was oddly disconcerting, for the boy was as blunt-spoken as ever and his smile was unevasive and congratulatory.

"Now you're free to do whatever you want to do," he told Edward. "You can open that reading clinic if you want to and help other people just like you helped me."

"And what will you do?"

"Shove off, I guess. I've had enough of this burg."

"What did you do all day yesterday?" Edward's voice was carefully toneless.

Rodack still smiled. "Looked for the present I wanted to buy you."

He handed Edward a small package. "Don't open it till I'm gone."

Edward kept it, in fact, for several days before opening it; he was busy with funeral arrangements, and Rodack had left town by the time Edward got around to seeing what was in the package.

At first it seemed like a rather tasteless joke. It was a book—a noted journalist's factual account of a notorious crime. Rodack had probably taken the book from the shop without bothering to pay for it.

There was an inscription in the boy's bold scrawl, along with a house key taped to the title page. Edward recognized the key, a duplicate of one he always carried and which he'd often left on his desk in the back room of the store.

Edward skimmed through the book that evening. It recounted the case of a prominent society woman who had been murdered by being struck over the head and submerged in a bathtub full of water. The woman's lover and alleged assailant had been arrested and tried, but the jury had acquitted him—there had been insufficient evidence that her death was not an accident. A misplaced key had been one of the prosecution's minor exhibits.

Before closing the book, Edward turned back and reread the boy's inscription: *Dear Ed–Without your help I would never have been able to read this book. With lasting gratitude, your friend, Tom Rodack.*

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an unusual story from Italy by

LAURA GRIMALDI

first publication in the United States

We found this story in an Italian anthology titled ANONIMA CAROGNE, *published in 1973 by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore of Milan and edited by Laura Grimaldi. The book is a thick handsome volume, beautifully produced, containing eleven stories; ten are by American and English writers and of these ten stories five appeared originally in EQMM—stories by Cornell Woolrich, Jerrold Phaon, Dana Lyon, Mary Barrett, and Florence V. Mayberry.*

The Italian story by Laura Grimaldi is titled "Giustizia è fatta." It has an unusual conception for a crime story—indeed, it may be that rara avis of mysteries, a unique plot-idea . . .

AFFIRMATION OF TRUTH; or, Justice Done

by LAURA GRIMALDI

(translated by Philip Rigby)

With the firm resolution to perform my duty as a man of honor, being conscious of the supreme moral and civil importance of the task that the Law has entrusted to me, I swear to listen diligently, and examine earnestly, proofs and reasons presented in this proceeding by the Prosecution and by the Defense. I swear to make my own judgment with honesty and impartiality and to keep far from my mind all feeling of aversion or favor, in order to reach a sentence equivalent to what society expects: an affirmation of truth and justice.

Jurors' oath (Art. 30).

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It had been a mistake to accept presiding over that trial. The Judge closed the court record, shaking his head. Yes, a big mistake. To begin with, a trial without legal or judicial precedents, one without procedural antecedents, is a minefield. More than that, it is a stretch of moving sands. And if that wasn't enough, there was the ridiculousness of a defendant made of printed paper instead of flesh and blood.

The Judge had the feeling it would all come to no good. In fact, at the beginning he had resisted all the objections, all the pressures, firmly entrenched behind the excuse that it had never been heard of before. But then that impertinent young man for the Defense, insistent and stubborn as a mule, had started to release press interviews, to insist that it was in someone's interest to obstruct the trial, to declare that no judge could be found who could give a fair verdict.

And the Prosecuter? He hadn't been idle either. He had managed to collect 10,000 signatures in the district alone, 10,000 respectable and right-thinking people who were demanding a ban on books with any kind of criminal settling. Thrillers, that's what they were, according to popular definition.

Faced with all this, what could the Judge do except surrender and agree to preside over the trial? And he had surrendered. He had agreed, knowing only too well it was a mistake. But he had done it, too, because in the end he had felt involved, intrigued, stimulated. Slightly at first, then with ever-increasing force.

Oh, well, he had to admit it. He had played his part with the knowledge that such a trial would have national repercussions. World-wide, in fact.

The light sense of guilt that nagged him left him at once. When it came down to it, he had spent all his life in the service of justice, among dusty documents, bringing pint-sized criminals to task for squalid little crimes, with prosecution and defense counsels only interested in making a name for themselves. Oh, yes, even the personalities of the Prosecution and the Defense had had their importance: the former was well-prepared, learned, upright in the extreme; the latter, brilliant, young, aggressive.

The Judge sighed and opened the court record again. What was it that had escaped him? At what point had the works clogged up? Why had the situation — at first so clear, so intriguing, so alive — seemed to peter out, to become dim, to lose its clarity ? The Judge told himself he had nothing to reproach himself for. He had guided the proceedings carefully, respecting, as always, the jurors' oath — an oath which from his very first case he had held before him like a shining light, an

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inspiration, something to cling on to. A pledge of honor. Of justice. All the times, on his insistence, that the jury had sworn it, he had felt pervaded by a kind of fierce pride. And he had made it his own oath.

The Judge got up to put on his woolen jacket. It was cold that evening and he intended to read the court record once again, if need be until dawn, to find that *something* which was bothering him, the thing that had to be the starting point of his discomfort, his discontent.

. . . I swear to listen diligently, and examine earnestly, proofs and reasons presented in this proceeding by the Prosecution and by the Defense. . .

The Judge sat down and turned once more to the first page.

JUDGE: I declare the hearing open, the Crown versus the Literary Criminal. Since it is a question of proceedings *sui generis,* without judicial precedents, I will state precisely that in this court an attempt will be made to establish — regardless of the fact that the procedure is less than orthodox — whether or not the Literary Criminal has some responsibility, and what that responsibility is to real life.

Some maintain that there are books of a certain type which influence, inspire, and mold the criminal, furnishing him with sophisticated plans, cunning alibis, devious means. Others, conversely, ask: was perhaps the thriller born when Cain betrayed and killed his brother? And did Lucrezia Borgia need to draw on a writer's imagination in order to put her murderous schemes into practice?

It will be this court's task, after hearing both Prosecution and Defense, to decide if the Literary Criminal is guilty or innocent. Notice that it is not by accident that I have spoken of the "Literary Criminal." I wish to make it clear, in fact, that this court will not tolerate the use of a different term.

Let us now turn our attention to the purpose of this trial. As I have said, we are trying to clarify once and for all, in a public hearing, if a certain type of fiction can be considered guilty of influencing, or having influenced, the mind of man. In other words, it will be the duty of this court to decide whether to acquit or condemn those fictional plots which, by nature of their savagery, their malice, their wickedness, can be held as the source of inspiration for the criminal, and, as a consequence, dangerous to public morality. . .

The Judge nodded his head. Apart from some repetition which

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was not indispensable, his introduction seemed to him essential, and above all, to the point. Undoubtedly the Defense had considered it to be a little too "dusty," but the Defending Counsel was one of those modern-speech types, from time to time downright irreverent. That young man had often stepped beyond the limits. He had become irritating. The Prosecutor, on the other hand, was a different kettle of fish, altogether a different breed.

. . . I swear to make my own judgment with honesty and impartiality and to keep far from my mind all feeling of aversion or favor. . .

Yes, thought the Judge. It wasn't always easy to remain so detached, so objective. He wondered if the small sneaking dislike he had felt for the Defending Counsel as the debate went on could have influenced his final decision. No, he told himself. He had acted according to the letter of the law.

PROSECUTOR: As I have already explained to the Court, I am totally convinced, and this conviction is supported by the solidarity of thousands of citizens who, with unswerving purpose, have made this debate possible, that a certain type of fiction must be considered harmful, dangerous, a form of infection —

DEFENSE COUNSEL: You've left out considerations of ecology.

The public gallery had laughed at that point and the Judge had been compelled to admonish the Defense Counsel and suggest a greater respect for the Court. The Defense Counsel had apologized, but his irony had stained the atmosphere, and for a time the members of the public present in court had been distracted, had taken to whispering comments, turning in their seats, shuffling their feet.

PROSECUTOR: I can state as a fact, having consulted the proceedings of various trials, that many criminals have openly confessed to being inspired by actions described in books which, if the matter rested in my hands, would never have been printed. I recall in particular the case of a certain Robert Butler who, on March 23, 1905, climbed the gallows, having been found guilty of mass murder. Well now, Butler stated at his trial that he was an inveterate reader of the works of the Marquis de Sade — a man who can never be deplored enough. Not only that: Butler publically admitted to being influenced by the wickedness of Fantomas and Fu Manchu in order to carry out his crimes. I repeat, if the matter had rested in my hands, certain books would never have been printed.

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DEFENSE COUNSEL: It is a source of relief to me that my illustrious colleague has chosen a forensic rather than an editorial career. If it had not been so, today we would be deprived of his eloquence while conversely the book business would have been shut down years ago. . .

The Judge scratched the lobe of his ear, once again sensing the same irritation. He couldn't have intervened, he recalled clearly, because officially the Defense Counsel had not done anything wrong, even if for a good five minutes he had imitated in his speech the tone and style of the Prosecutor. And again the gallery had laughed, had been distracted.

The Judge rose and walked up and down for a while, more in an attempt to restore a feeling of calm than to stretch his legs. That irritating young man had even reeled off an unending stream of quotations — it had to be admitted he was thoroughly prepared — to oppose the cultural references made by the Prosecution.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: I maintain that men like Napoleon and Frederick the Great should have been brought to trial, not to mention writers like Shakespeare and Aeschylus.

PROSECUTOR: Perhaps that's why *Mein Kampf*, the most criminal of all books, has already been condemned by history.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: I have presented irrefutable evidence of crimes committed in real life which, by their savagery, have no counterpart on the printed page. Let us not forget, moreover, that whereas in stories the guilty person is almost always brought to justice, unfortunately we cannot say the same of everyday life. . .

. . . I swear to examine earnestly proofs and reasons presented in this proceeding by the Prosecution and by the Defense. . .

And he had done so. He had examined in all earnestness the proofs and reasons of the Prosecution and Defense Counsels. The former had presented to the Court many cases in which the defendants had freely confessed to being influenced by the plots of this or that book. The latter, on the other hand, had attached to the exhibits a summary of famous trials in which the criminal's savagery had greatly surpassed the fictional imagination of any author.

PROSECUTOR: I ask for an exemplary conviction. I am sure that the Court will have made its —

DEFENSE COUNSEL: It would be an outrage to the freedom of expression, an unforgivable restriction on human imagination, an

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offense against culture itself. It is not by accident that in this court the names of great writers have echoed. If I am not mistaken, it was my learned colleague who mentioned the works of Poe and Dostoevsky. . .

The Judge, with complete impartiality, had pronounced a verdict of acquittal on grounds of insufficient evidence. He had not heard arguments sufficient either to sentence or absolve the literary prisoner at the bar. The Prosecutor had seemed pleased enough. Had an unconditional discharge really been expected, in light of the turn the trial had taken in the closing moments?

The gallery had become noisy when the Prosecutor, losing for a moment his sense of proportion, had maintained that the man in the street was incapable of free will, that all that was needed was a particularly savage crime to turn him into a bloodthirsty animal.

The Defending Counsel had been much cleverer, more subtle. How many of those present in court, he asked, could swear they had never read a book portraying violence? And maybe the reading of that book had been engraved on their minds, on their moral choices, on the self-control of the reader?

By his own reckoning the Judge was sure he had given a fair verdict even if for his own comfort a more conclusive sentence could have been passed. "All or nothing," the Defense Counsel would have said, with that rather too free and easy style of speaking — although the Judge had to admit it was somewhat effective. The verdict had, in fact, caused pandemonium. Well, there you are, thought the Judge. Everything had hinged on the verdict.

DEFENSE COUNSEL: I protest! Since these proceedings have been, as the Court itself made clear, a trial *sui generis,* with consequences more flexible, less restrictive from the point of view of procedure, I must take the liberty of rejecting the Court's verdict. I consider it iniquitous, oppressive, and totally unjustified. I have cited irrefutable proofs of the innocence of the accused, and if the Court had been objective, the verdict could only have been one of unconditional discharge. A verdict based on insufficient evidence is, in fact, the equivalent of a conviction. I am compelled to think that the Court has not had the courage to accept its full responsibility. In other words it has sinned in the name of timidity. . .

The Defense Counsel had continued in the same vein for a long time, raising his voice, making the atmosphere tense, profiting

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from the open admiration of the gallery.

JUDGE: I must ask the Defending Counsel to moderate his tone and language, which I consider to be offensive and unworthy of a Court of Justice. Otherwise I shall be compelled to —

DEFENSE COUNSEL: If there is anything unworthy of a Court of Justice, it is this decision —

JUDGE: I demand that the Defending Counsel be removed from the courtroom!

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Ah, now we see the heavy hand of authority, the insensitivity, the closed mind —

JUDGE: Bailiff, approach the Bench!

DEFENSE COUNSEL: Yes, Bailiff, approach the Bench and take *him* out of the courtroom!

. . .in order to reach a sentence equivalent to what society expects: an affirmation of truth and justice.

The Judge closed his eyes. He recalled the face of the Bailiff: good-natured, surprised, embarrassed. And he recalled his own indignation, and that of the Prosecutor, at how the proceedings had been turned into a farce, a public brawl. He recalled too the Bailiff's holster within reach of his hand, unfastened, the butt seemingly offering itself to his fingers.

He recalled also the shot, not so loud as he would have expected — a kind of *phut*, little more than a smack. And how the Defending Counsel had fallen, breaking off halfway through a word: corr— What was he on the point of saying? Corruption?

The Judge closed the court record. Someone was opening the door. A rattling noise, the jangle of the guard's keys, a cracking sound, then a hoarse common voice: "Half hour fresh air, then clean out your cell."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Cork novelet by

S. S. RAFFERTY

S. S. Rafferty's debut in print was "Murder by Scalping; or, The Invisible Indian," in the July 1973 issue of EQMM. The story introduced Captain Jeremy Cork, a pre-Revolutionary War detective who specialized in what he called "social puzzles."

Mr. Rafferty's next four stories were about Chick Kelly, a night-club-comedian who has not only a nose for crime but, more importantly, an ear for detection.

Now Mr. Rafferty gives us "Captain Cork's Second Case," set in Philadelphia circa 1735. Captain Cork is a truly American detective—as homegrown as Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner and William Faulkner's Uncle Gavin, as American as James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking and Manly Wade Wellman's Indian detective, David Return. To quote one of the characters in the story, "Captain Cork is a rare breed . . . like most native-born Americans he is shrewd and resourceful, and sees a challenge in everything . . . (and he has an) unlimited capacity to believe in the heroic" . . .

CAPTAIN CORK'S SECOND CASE; or, A Fogbank of Confusion

by S. S. RAFFERTY

(The following is taken from the papers of Wellman Oaks, a former English bond slave, who lived in Connecticut between 1713 and the late 1780s. Some liberties have been taken with Oaks's original syntax, spelling, and the use of obscure colloquialisms to make his own work more meaningful to the contemporary reader.)

If I were to say, "It's a small world," Captain Jeremy Cork

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would surely note that I dwell in clichés. But how else can I phrase the chance meeting with Major Tell and the venerable Squire Delaney in as unlikely a spot as Philadelphia? It was unlikely because the Squire makes his home in the Rhode Island Colony, where he raises horses—notably, the descendants of the famous Narragansett Pacer. Major Philip Tell is a Redcoat who serves as a royal emissary to the Governor of the Bay Colony. As for Captain Cork and myself, we call an inn on the Connecticut coast our home port, but we are rarely there, owing to our various enterprises. My main interest, as Cork's chief financial yeoman, is to develop trade contracts for *The Hawkers*, a ship which the Captain owns but rarely sails in. Cork's ambitions tend towards permanent indolence, save his time-consuming forays into the solution of crimes, which he calls "social puzzles."

It was this chance meeting with these two old friends that set us on a collision course with the most perplexing murder case that has ever come Cork's way.

Cork and I were supping in the public rooms at Morby's in Spring Garden Street. It was a bit of a celebration for me, because we had struck a good bargain that afternoon. As for Cork's demeanour, it was as usual—every meal was a celebration. We first went through the ritual of teaching the innkeeper how to make the Captain's favourite drink, Apple Knock. I personally wish he wouldn't keep giving the recipe away; there's an off-chance we might some day be able to bottle this potent potable.

We were just finishing our first mug of the draught when a robust voice called Cork's name.

"Cork, my lad," Delaney said, as he thundered up to the table. He was as round and squat as a threepenny loaf, and as merry as an elf.

"When I heard someone was drinking Apple Knock, I knew you had to be in the vicinity. How are you, Oaks?" he said, shaking hands and taking a seat. Delaney had come to Mister Penn's Commonwealth to look at several brood mares of some local reputation. He, too, had found business success, and his joy added to the festivities of our table.

It was turning into quite a party when lo and behold, Major Tell arrived at our chair backs. Normally, I abhor Tell's presence, because he is constantly involving Cork in some investigation or other, and always at our expense. But he came to us crime-free this day,

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and I joined heartily in his welcome and the exchange of introductions.

Well, it was quite a feast. Old Morby himself supervised the entire fare that came to us in ten courses. The snap-turtle soup was laced well with madeira, and the raw oysters were cold and succulent as those we get in Connecticut. We were introduced to curious nutty-tasting sausages that were provisioned by local Palatine farmers, and finished off with a superb saddle of venison and roasted corn.

Our bellies full, we pushed back from the table and talked a while of Captain Cork's cases. I, for one, was bound for bed, but the Squire and Cork would have none of it. The Squire enjoys his city sojourns from his ranch at Point Judith, and Cork needs very little encouragement to join in a night of revelry. The evening's excursion was planned with our attendance at a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, and later, a stop-off at a certain Maudie Phillips' house—for a late supper, I presumed, although I could not conceive how we would be hungry.

The cast of the play was very good, all English. Juliet was a lovely morsel, and I said so during the intermission, much to everyone's laughter.

"These players are King's soldiers, my dear Oaks," the Major said amidst guffaws. "*All* of them are soldiers making some extra money."

"It seems your lady love is but some Corporal or perhaps a Lieutenant," Delaney joined the jibing.

Well, my embarrassment was beyond words, and I welcomed our return to our seats. The rest of the play had lost its verve for me, but I tried to be attentive. We were at the part where Juliet has taken the sleeping potion, and Nurse enters to waken her.

The soldier playing the nurse was a nimble fellow, and played the discovery scene with much flightiness until he got to the line, "Alas, alas! Help, help! my lady's dead!" when he stopped and did not go on.

There was an uneasy murmuring in the audience as we waited for the next line, but it never came. The nurse turned to the wings and said in his man's voice, "My God, he really is dead!"

After the theatre was cleared, and Major Tell returned from a quick tour backstage, we learned that the Juliet part was played by a Lieutenant Morgan, and his poisoning (for that was what it appeared to be) was inexplicable.

An army surgeon arrived in

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the midst of Tell's report and was introduced around as Captain Treford.

"Delighted to meet you, Captain Cork," he said. "Since this appears to be death by sinister means, you might be kind enough to accompany me in the examination of the body."

Cork, of course, couldn't resist, and bid us all join himself and the military doctor. We went behind the curtains and found the body sprawled across a bed. The handsome face, heavily masked with stage makeup to accentuate the features, was now contorted in a death spasm.

The doctor quickly went to work, first smelling the dead mouth.

"Some form of cyanide," he said as he undid the corpse's blouse. He did not feel for a heartbeat nor perform any of the usual post-mortem examinations because he mirrored our collective shock and confusion—Lieutenant Morgan may have been a soldier, but the anatomy of our dead Juliet proved that she was definitely a woman in life.

"It appears, Oaks, that we all owe you an apology," Cork said to me as we sat again at Morby's several hours later. The cold hands of death had erased the merriment from our evening. "You seem to be the only person in Philadelphia to have seen that Juliet was a real woman."

I could not accept such an accolade, since my observation was one of naiveté rather than acuity; but I let it pass. The dead woman, it was learned, was Betsy Morgan, sister to Lieutenant Morgan, the soldier who usually played the Juliet part. On this fateful night, the Morgans had decided to play a joke on the cast. Juliet would be played by Betsy, while her brother remained in their rooms. At the final curtain, James Morgan was to stroll into the theatre and the frolic would be exposed, much to everyone's embarrassment and the Morgans' delight.

"It was typical of those two, I am told," Tell said. "They had only been in the Colonies these last six months, and were considered a bit wild."

"Strange that a sub-Lieutenant should have his family with him, isn't it, Major?" Delaney wanted to know.

"Not really, Squire. She was his only relative, and could get permission to come out. Morgan's extra earnings as an actor would support her. His Company Commander tells me he was quite a gambler, and lucky, too."

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While we talked, Cork remained silent. I knew he was honing his mind for the blade work of logic that lay ahead. Our attention was quickly drawn to the arrival of a Redcoat Captain, who served as the local detachment Provost Marshal. The army considered it a military case, since the intended victim was a soldier and officer.

Captain Brace's aristocratic bearing shone through his uniform. He was coolly detached, yet efficient in his organization of facts. He had either never heard of Cork, or had decided to ignore his reputation, since he merely nodded when introduced.

"This affair seems relatively simple," the Provost said, after refusing both pipe and bowl, "and, in fact, we have the culprit in hand."

"Quick work, Captain. Excellent!" Tell complimented his fellow officer, who took it as his due.

"A simple crime of passion that backlashed, Major. Really not a challenge at all. The poison was placed in a jug of mulled wine which is kept backstage for the potion-drinking scene. The poison must have been placed there sometime after the curtain went up, because one of the stagehands nipped from it with no ill effects just a few minutes before the performance."

"And the culprit, Sir?" Delaney was impatient, as was myself. Cork appeared to be asleep.

"A hellion named Tessie Keller, gentlemen. A common bond slave, mind you."

I startled a bit at that. I, too, was a bond slave on my arrival from England years back. I was given my freedom five minutes after Captain Cork bought my contract. He could not and can not abide the idea that every man is not his own agent within the confines of a social contract.

"Yes, gentlemen," the Provost went on bitingly, "a barmaid at the tavern next to the theatre. She delivers beer and food to the players each night before the performance, and claims that young Morgan has her with child. In fact, she had a heated scene with the young officer just last night. It was a devilish row, and took two members of the cast to drag her off Morgan and eject her. The Keller wench was in the theatre tonight on her deliveries and had ample time and opportunity to place the poison in the jug. She knew of the jug's whereabouts—we know that to be a fact."

"Well, Cork." Major Tell addressed himself to the seem-

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ingly comatose Captain, "it appears that your M-O-M theory is not unknown to the Provost here, and is definitely operative, heh?"

"M-O-M theory?" The Provost looked puzzled.

"Yes, Captain Brace. Cork has some reputation in these crime dealings, and has a notion that a culprit must have Means, Opportunity, and Motive to successfully execute a crime. He further contends that an examination of all the M-O-Ms will eventually reveal the perpetrator of the crime. Hey, Cork. Cork! My God, man, are you asleep?"

The Captain raised his eyelids. "No, Tell, merely asking myself some questions. Tell me, Provost Marshal, who else is suspected in this affair?"

"Who else?" the Provost said imperiously. "My God, man, why look for anyone else when the murderess is in hand; in fact, under lock and key at this moment, awaiting the King's justice."

"Why, indeed, sir? And what of the King's mercy? I subscribe to you, Provost Marshal, that Mistress Keller appears to be conveniently available and obviously vulnerable."

"I can assure you, Cork, that a slut's vulnerability is not in my province."

"And that, Sir, may well be an attitude that may some day cause us all concern, Colonial and homelander alike. But let it pass. The issues that confuse me are manifold. First, this subaltern and his sister are noted for their wild living. The young man is a known gambler. What of the late Mistress Morgan's comportment?"

"Quite a lass, as I have been informed," Tell chuckled. "Has damn near broken every heart in the regiment."

"There you have my position, Provost. Here are a young couple who ride roughshod over the immediate populace with their pranks, and the only person with a grievance that can be found is a simple barmaid? Were there no heavy losers to the gambling actor-soldier? Were there no spurned lovers to the beauteous émigrée?"

"Well, that last is a fallacy." The Provost was a bit irritated by Cork's challenge, and took to his snuff box. "How could anyone plan to kill Miss Morgan when no one knew she was to assume her brother's role? The family resemblance and stage makeup made detection impossible. Lieutenant Morgan is slight and small-boned, and handsome almost to the point of girlishness. That is precisely why he excels in playing Shakespearean women. No one could have recognised the

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transformation—or switch, as you Americans say."

"A purely mechanical term, Provost. It's the wont of frontier people to streamline the language. But your belief that the switch was not detected is pure assumption. Come now, you are too methodical to fall in with rash judgements. Who else is in your net?"

"My apologies, Cork," the Provost said without the slightest hint of apology. "Of course we considered other suspects, but none stands the test of evidence as this Keller woman."

"Well, by all means, Captain Brace, let us have the whole lot," Major Tell demanded impatiently.

"Certainly, Sir. Believe me, every enquiry has been made and checked." For a moment, he started on the defence, but Tell would have none of it. One thing I'll say for Tell, he knows how to command, by jing.

Captain Brace ticked off his information. In addition to the barmaid, there were others who had grievances against Lieutenant Morgan. First was a Private Holt, who had received a ten-stroke flogging at Morgan's command for having been asleep at his post. This, Brace, with some justification, brushed aside, for if every member of the rank and file took to poisoning their superiors, there soon wouldn't be much left of the British Army.

Then there was a Lieutenant Pinks, who had lodged a formal complaint against Morgan for cheating at cards. The case was dismissed owing to insufficient evidence. This, too, Brace cast aside as a puerile reason for homicide.

What was evolving was a picture of a young officer with many failings in the human-being department. Both the flogged Private and the supposedly cheated Lieutenant were in the theatre this night; the enlisted man was a dresser for the actors and Lieutenant Pinks played a minor role in the production.

"Well, Captain Brace," Cork said at the end of the report, "what of those with grievances against the dead girl? Forgive me, I know you are engaged to the idea that no one knew Juliet's true identity, and that the poisoning was meant for the girl's brother, but let's toss caution to the winds and see where it takes us. Here is a saucy beauty who trifled with men's hearts. Surely we all know enough about life to concede that everyone wishes someone dead at some point in time."

"Well, there were a few, er,

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Cavaliers. But I remind you, Sir, that they are all officers and gentlemen."

"Yes, we respect that, but we are tossing caution, Captain Brace. Let us think the unthinkable.".

Brace snorted a bit and glanced at Tell for help. Finding none, he carried on briskly. "There were a number of young officers in her train, to be sure. That would be expected."

"No rejected lovers, Brace? No duels over her hand?"

"Duelling is forbidden, as you well know, Cork." They had dropped the amenities of "Captain" and "Sir" now, and had resolved that they did not like each other a half joe's worth. "And I submit I am not a chronicler of the regiment's love life."

"To be sure, you are the Provost Marshal. But, as the chief investigator in a murder case, you are bound by your office to study all aspects of the case. Is there anyone who held a grievance against the brother and sister jointly?"

Well, at this point, I found myself in sympathy with Captain Brace. Next, Cork would be suspecting that someone poisoned the girl because they didn't like Shakespeare. I could see that even Major Tell and the Squire felt he was going too far.

Captain Brace got to his feet, gave a nod to the Major, and looked dead on at Cork. "I have heard of your exploits, Captain Cork," he said, confirming my suspicions that he had, "but to be bluntly honest, I view them as pure sensationalism. I have my suspect, and will get a conviction on the basis of the evidence. You are welcome to hear it at to-morrow's inquest. Good evening, gentlemen."

"Well, Cork," the Squire chuckled when Brace was out of earshot, "you have found no friend there."

"I count no friendship with a fool. If you will excuse us, gentlemen, Oaks and I have some matters to attend to."

"Some matters" indeed! We moved through the night like a whirlwind. Cork had ordered all the facts in his mind, and admitted he could find no solution by mere thinking. He now needed action, live speech instead of reports.

Our first stop was at the theatre where we found Goggins, the stagehand; a dank old fellow with dirty white hair and the haze of perpetual drunkenness in his eyes. He answered Cork's questions with a heavy sour breath, and verified Brace's report of his having nipped from the jug just before the curtain went up.

"Yes, your Lordship, I took a

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slug or two to-night. Do it every night at the same time. Helps me get through the performance, as the actors say."

I was thankful when we finally dismissed him, for his reek had me gagging. Cork was shaking his head as he watched the demi-drunkard retreat.

"He seems unshakeable, Captain," I said.

"And that's the shame of it. The most crucial point in the entire case, and it rests on the word of a rumpot."

"Well, I can't see that it is so crucial. All the suspects were in the theatre at the time of the curtain's rise, and all could have slipped the poison in."

"That's what bothers me most, but we must put it aside for now. Let us seek out this Private who was flogged on Morgan's orders."

Private Holt was backstage hanging up costumes when we approached him. He was a thinnish lad of 18 or so, with a weak chin and the air of Northern England in his speech. He was anything but revengeful of Lieutenant Morgan.

"Lors be, Sor, 'e did me the favor of a floggin', 'e did. If it wor any other of the officers, I would have been shot on the spot for nappin' on my post." He fidgeted with a cloak as he talked. He spoke glowingly of his Lieutenant and told us of his high spirits and convivial ways.

"Doesn't seem like much of a suspect, does he?" I asked as we left the theatre.

"Never really was," Cork replied, "unless he has learned to act while serving as a dresser."

Once on the street, Cork made for the tavern that lay close by. It was the place to which Tessie Keller was bonded, and appeared to be a clubhouse for off-duty young subalterns.

Without announcing ourselves or our mission, we mingled with the young men—mingling is rather a poor word, because Cork is six foot six, and doesn't blend in well. We casually fell to talking with a small group at the bar. There was no need to steer the conversation towards the murder; the room was awash with it.

"Damned shame," a young fellow with an unbuttoned tunic said, "that beauty being done in by mistake. Too bad it wasn't that rotter."

"I understand that Lieutenant Morgan's men thought highly of him," Cork said, offhandedly.

"He had the most undisciplined platoon in the regiment," the young officer snarled. "Morgan would rather play-act and mark cards than soldier."

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"You sound as if you have had personal experience with him, Lieutenant—er—"

"Pinks, Lieutenant Pinks at your service, Sir." He tossed a crisp salute. "Personal experience, indeed. I almost got him cashiered a few weeks ago for cheating, but I couldn't make the charge stick."

"Pinks, is it? Of course, I saw your performance tonight."

"You flatter me, Sir," he smiled. "It is a very minor role, and done only to make some extra money."

"So you believe that Miss Morgan was killed by mistake?"

"Well, that's obvious, isn't it? Who would want to murder a woman?"

"Yes," Cork tugged on his grandee's barba and muttered to himself, "I keep asking myself the same question. Tell me, Lieutenant Pinks, did Miss Morgan have any suitors?"

The Lieutenant grinned sheepishly and waved his arm as if to indicate everyone in the room. "Take your pick, including myself. She was lovely, but a treacherous female, who seemed to find joy in breaking men's hearts. All the same," his voice lowered, "she was lovely."

"I can understand your feelings, Lieutenant; the moth to the flame. Who would you say was her current suitor?"

"That would be Ensign Garfield, poor chap. He's taking it very hard. I genuinely feel that Betsy had met her match and would have married Garfield, if her brother had not interfered."

"He objected, did he?"

"That's putting it mildly. It was quite a row. Morgan had a fit when he heard of Garfield's intentions. It damn near turned into a duel, but Garfield is a gentleman, and would not fight a man for his sister."

At this point, a brother officer invited Pinks to take his turn at darts, and he left us. We ordered more ale—Cork rarely drinks Apple Knock when working—and talked.

"So you found what you came for, Captain?"

"Perhaps, Oaks. But Garfield would have to have been in the theatre, and from Brace's report, I assume that he wasn't. I'm still not satisfied. Is the owner about?" he asked the bartender.

"At your service, lads. Owner, tapman, cook, and pot-washer since they hauled that wench off to gaol for trying to do in her lover boy. That twenty pounds I paid for her contract is gone with the wind."

"Perhaps she is innocent and will return to your service."

"Not much of a chance, with the Provost putting a rope around her neck."

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"Well, the trap's not sprung yet. Tell me, did she have access to poison?"

"Let me see," the innkeeper stroked make-believe hair on a bald head. "She could have stolen it from the apothecary across the way. She's in and out of there regularly. Funny thing, though. Tessie is a hot-blooded little hellcat. If she was out to get the Lieutenant, I would have predicted it would be with a knife in the chest."

"But poison is a woman's weapon," I put in.

"Poison is a weapon and nothing more," Cork said abruptly. "If anything, it is a coward's weapon. But you bring up an interesting point, mine host. The means in this case do not suit Tessie's passionate ways."

When we were back in our rooms late that night, Cork sat in a hardback chair and puffed in earnest on a clay pipe.

"I still say poison is a woman's weapon, and Tessie appears to be the only woman in the case," I said.

"Except the victim," he reminded me.

"Come, Captain, surely you're not entertaining the idea of suicide. Betsy Morgan, like Juliet, taking poison because she couldn't have her Romeo ensign?"

"No. But your reference is at fault. Juliet didn't take poison, she took a sleeping potion. It's a great fogbank of confusion, this case is. We have a welter of suspects, but not one who had a motive to kill Betsy Morgan herself."

"Why is that so important? Isn't it explained by the impersonation? It was murder by mistake."

"Or maybe not."

The next morning brought us a fine sun, wonderful plates of scrapple and eggs, and a visit to the regimental stockade where Tessie Keller was gaoled.

She was a spitting hellion who cursed her warders and the British in general. Her long black hair and fierce ebon eyes gave away the hot Spanish blood that was infused into the Irish race when the remnants of the Armada were wrecked on its shores and stayed on to marry and mingle.

Somehow, Cork's appearance seemed to quiet her—perhaps we were the first people she had seen out of uniform since her arrest. Cork asked her direct questions and received terse answers. She admitted she was not with child, but had used that as a ruse to test Morgan's love. Yes, she hated him; and if she could have, she would have killed him. But she swore before God that she was innocent.

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His interrogation complete, Cork asked to see Ensign Garfield, and we were led to the squad room across the compound.

I am sure that a woman would have found the Ensign handsome, but this day he looked dismally haggard. His eyes blinked in spasms which suggested a gross lack of sleep and the turmoil of inner tension. It could have been grief, remorse, or fear. I did not know, for I was becoming sceptical of everything, in the manner of my employer.

By his own admission, Garfield could not account for his whereabouts the night before. He had been so dejected by his having been spurned by Betsy on her brother's orders that he spent the early evening walking by the river. He had met no one who could vouch for him, but surely he would not poison a man when he could have had his life in a duel.

"Perhaps you would have lost, young man."

"Not to Morgan, Sir. He isn't much of a hand with a blade."

"You said you were 'spurned' by Betsy. Wasn't she obeying her brother?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But she could have disobeyed him if she really loved me. It was not as if she would be disinherited. They have no fortune to protect. Yet Morgan snapped his fingers and she danced to his tune. I admit I was jealous of his power over her."

"You probably know more about the Morgans than anyone. Where are they from?"

"Surrey, I believe. No family. Just themselves. That's why she was permitted to come out here. Aside from that, I know nothing."

We excused ourselves and left the building. We were at the compound's gate when we met the Provost Marshal.

"Well, Cork, I hear you've been to see my pigeon," Brace said with gusto. "I reserved two seats for you at the inquest this afternoon. I hope you plan to attend."

"Have no fear of that, Brace. By the way, where does Lieutenant Morgan live? I understand he is allowed to live outside the compound."

"In Nagel's Alley, four blocks north. But I can't see why you want to bother that young man in his grief."

Cork merely smiled and turned north, with me in tow.

Lieutenant Morgan's rooms were on the top floor of a small house owned by Mistress Laura White. She took us to Morgan's door and introduced us to the soldier-actor with quick despatch, and returned to her housework.

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The Lieutenant was a man of 25 or so, and lived up to Brace's early description of his handsomeness. It was easy to see how this slightly built man could become a convincing woman with makeup and proper padding.

To be sure, he was grief-stricken, but he was bearing up much better than Ensign Garfield.

The rooms were simple, yet showed his late sister's feminine touch. A main sitting room was flanked on both sides by bedchambers. A miniature of Betsy sat on the mantel, and caught Cork's attention.

"You'll forgive me, Lieutenant Morgan, but I can't share the feeling that you and your sister resemble each other that much."

"God rest her soul, she favored my mother's side. I'm more in my father's line. But the coloring and bone structure are about the same. What can I do for you, Captain?"

"I think it is important, in cases like this, to see where the victim lived and get a picture of how she approached life. Quite gay, wasn't she?"

"Too gay for her own good. But she was my love. Always had to get her out of scrapes when we were children."

"Did you consider the Ensign Garfield affair a 'scrape'?"

The question brought a dark look into Morgan's eyes. "It was not what it appeared to be. Garfield meant nothing to her. A mild flirtation which she finally dismissed. But why all the questions? Tessie, that hellion, took Betsy from me. By God, I wish I *had* been playing the role that night. I would rather be dead than be without her."

"Yes, I understand your grief. Tell me, Morgan, what happened last night? Was her impersonation really a prank?"

The young man hung his head, and after a minute said, "No, it wasn't a prank. I was under the weather, and we needed the money I get from the play. It's expensive keeping a woman comfortable on a Lieutenant's pay.

"Well, Betsy came up with the idea of playing the part. She was quite a little actress in her own right, you know, and had played Juliet before. I went along with it because I could see no harm in it. I merely sent a note to my dresser that I would be late and would get into costume at home. It was an easy thing to bring off."

"What about Tessie Keller? Did you have an affair with her?"

"A mild one, but not to the point of conception, I assure you. She mistook kindness for

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love, and compounded it with deceit."

As the young man spoke, Cork became restless and began to walk around the room. At one point he stopped and pointed into a bedchamber.

"Yours?" he asked.

"No, mine is the one on the other side. Forgive me, Captain, I appreciate your interest, but I must get dressed for the inquest."

"Of course, my good man, but one more question. Did your sister have any enemies?"

"Enemies!" The thought amazed him. "She was loved by all, I can assure you."

"Perhaps too much."

"Yes," Morgan said, "perhaps too much."

The inquest was a study in military efficiency. Witness after witness came forward to build a wall of evidence against Tessie Keller.

The apothecary was forced to admit under Brace's examination that Tessie had access to poison in his shop. The military surgeon who had examined the body gave expert testimony that Betsy Morgan had died of potassium cyanide poisoning, and that the wine jug contained the same.

Probably the most damning of all testimony was Tessie's self-admitted falsehood about her pregnancy, and her avowed hatred of Morgan. Like many Irishwomen of her kind, her own tongue was her downfall.

After half an hour's consultation, the Board reconvened and handed in a finding that Tessie stand trial for the murder of Betsy Morgan. The trial was to take place ten days hence. To my surprise, Cork murmured, "Thank God for ten days."

The Chairman of the Board, a gaunt Colonel, asked Tessie if she could afford counsel, and she did not answer.

"Very well, the Court will appoint one," the Colonel said.

"Good sirs." I almost jumped out of my skin as Cork got to his feet and addressed the Court. "If the Court is willing, I will assume that responsibility."

"Gentlemen," Captain Brace was on his feet and charging in. "This is unfair to the woman. Have you legal credentials, Sir?"

"I am a Justice of the Peace in the Connecticut Colony, a ship's master, and a student of humanity, which is more than I can say for most lawyers."

The last got a few laughs, but the point about being a Justice of the Peace was pure fancy. I doubted, however, that anyone was about to ride to Connecticut to challenge him. Needless to say, Cork is a master of the bold stroke, no matter that he is standing on a sand dune

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of lies.

And, by jing, he brought it off, much to Brace's disgust and complaint. He was appointed Tessie's counsel. Now listen to this for gall: when the Chairman of the Board refused Tessie bail, Cork merely shrugged and smiled. "It is of no great concern. I'm sure ten days as the King's guest will not affect Mistress Keller. I guarantee that on the eleventh day, she will be free."

If ever I have lost my patience with Cork, it could not surpass that which I experienced during the next ten days. Here was a man about to assume the responsibility of defending a woman's life, and he did nothing to prepare for it. He consulted not one law book. He rarely mentioned the case, and, except for seeing that she was well cared for, never visited or thought about Tessie Keller. I believed him monstrous. Was his ego so great, his love of the crowd's attention so strong, that he would sacrifice a bondswoman's life to exercise it?

I mentioned this to Squire Delaney one afternoon in his rooms. The rancher had decided to stay over to hear Cork's defence.

"I wouldn't fret over it, Oaks," he said, as he poured his home-made usquebaugh, which is as potent as Cork's Apple Knock. "If ever my life was on the line, I couldn't find a better man to defend it."

"But Cork is such a damn strange man. He treats it all as a game. Not just the trial, but life itself."

"He is a rare breed, Oaks, and, like most native-born Americans, he is shrewd and resourceful, and sees a challenge in everything. I think those of us from the old country resent their unlimited capacity to believe in the heroic."

Well! I thought to myself, that was just like an Irishman. I make a factual observation, and he turns it into a metaphysical dissertation. I swear there are times when I feel there are too few sober men like myself left in our society.

I was most irked during our ten-day wait for the trial by Cork's good-time activities. He had become quite a favourite among the younger officers, and spent much of his time carousing with them. I, of course, busied myself with visits to local trading houses in order to better understand the financial community.

The morning of the trial found us all seated in the theatre where the crime had been committed. The trial panel, under public pressure,

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had decided to hold an open trial, and the theatre was the only building in the area large enough to hold a crowd. I might add that this setting did not in the least bother Cork. I could see that he was going to give a performance, and therefore the setting was appropriate.

The panel, which seated itself on stage at a big table, consisted of six officers of varying rank. Its Chairman was an old Colonel named Hew-Davis, who spoke through his teeth as if his face was petrified. I have never seen a sterner judge.

Captain Brace sat alone at a small table at stage left. Cork and the Keller woman had places at their own table at the right of the stage.

Colonel Hew-Davis convened the proceeding with a gavel rap, and proceeded to warn the audience that its presence would be tolerated only so long as it remained orderly.

Brace opened for the prosecution with a recitation of the facts of the case, and promised to produce witnesses to support his conclusions.

During these remarks, Tessie Keller played with a nosegay to quell her obvious nervousness. Cork absorbed himself in a book. At first glance, I took heart at his finally reading a law book, and then recognised that it was a copy of Shakespeare that he had purchased a few days before in a Market Street stall. The utter gall of the man was surpassed only by his chronic inattentiveness.

When Brace had finished his opening remarks, the hall fell silent. Colonel Hew-Davis had to call Cork's name twice to get his nose out of the book. And then what does the genius say?

"Gentlemen," he said, half rising, "we will reserve opening remarks and merely state that Mistress Keller is innocent and we shall prove it beyond a doubt."

That's all. It was a flat-footed beginning, and I could see from the slight smirk on Brace's face that the Captain was in trouble.

Much of the morning was taken up with Brace's parade of witnesses. Slowly and carefully, the Provost Marshal erected a mountain of supportive evidence.

He produced expert testimony from the military doctor that death was by potassium cyanide poisoning. He brought in several witnesses who swore to Tessie's anger with Lieutenant Morgan, and her presence in the theatre before the fatal performance. The most damning evidence came in the testimony of Elias Tillroll, the apothecary, to whom Tessie had delivered meals. Under careful,

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and I must say, tactful, examination, Brace got the chemist to admit that Tessie could easily have stolen the poison from his shop.

Any fool could see that this was calling for a conclusion from a witness, and the basest twit would have challenged it; but Cork remained silent.

"Captain Cork," Colonel Hew-Davis said, a bit abashed at the defence's lack of legal aplomb, "do you care to cross-examine?"

"No, thank you, sir, not at this time," Cork said again, as he had said of every witness. I found myself looking at Squire Delaney sitting next to me, and wondered if he was rewriting his previous accolades to Cork's talent.

We reconvened after a somber lunch at which Cork busied himself with his book and 36 raw oysters. Brace was on his feet again, slithering through a résumé, and finally said, "The defence rests."

I unconsciously took a deep breath as Cork got to his feet. It was the first time he had addressed the panel in an erect position, and his six foot six frame dominated the stage. The defence was now afoot, and I hoped Cork knew where he was going.

"Gentlemen," Cork began, hooking his thumbs on his belt, "we have spent the day listening to a parade of facts that appear to be irrefutable. I do not contest them because all the witnesses were telling the truth."

The audience broke into murmurs, and was quickly hushed by Hew-Davis' gavel. This was insanity.

"Do I conclude, sir," the old Colonel said, "that you wish to change the plea to 'guilty'?"

"I could do that, Colonel. It would be easy to seek leniency on a lesser plea—say, a crime of passion—and place Mistress Keller at your mercy. But I fear I can't take that road. You see, gentlemen, my task is not to argue the points of evidence raised here. If I am to free the accused, I must offer you a replacement."

"Objection, sir," Brace said from his table. "The defence is resorting to dramatics."

"If the actions here are dramatic, they are so by their nature, and not my design."

The Colonel sustained the objection and counseled Cork to stick to the point.

"The point is dramatically clear. Tessie Keller had no motive to kill Betsy Morgan. So if it was Betsy Morgan who was *meant* to be killed, then we must look elsewhere. The only way I can *prove* Mistress Keller's innocence is by produc-

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ing the real murderer. And that I am prepared to do."

Brace was on the attack again. "Gentlemen," he thundered, "may I remind the panel that it is the Keller woman who is on trial and not some mysterious phantom killer? I must demand that Captain Cork concern himself with the issue at hand."

"Well, Captain," Hew-Davis cleared his throat, "the panel wants to see justice done, but it is a bit confused. I think you will admit this is irregular."

"How so, Colonel? If I were to successfully defend this girl, Captain Brace would only have to find another suspect. I am just trying to save time."

I couldn't swear to it, but I was sure I caught a glimpse of a smile on the Colonel's stone face. He allowed that Cork could proceed, but that he would be held responsible for his actions. With this, Cork set about to break every rule in jurisprudence.

First, he handed a list to the panel and asked that all those on it be called and sworn. The Colonel went along with this unorthodoxy, despite Brace's protests. The Provost Marshal's ire increased when he was told he too was to be sworn. There was a bit of a legal donnybrook over this, but Cork won the point in that he had a right to question the investigating officer.

The rest of those listed were Lieutenant Morgan; Private Holt; Lieutenant Pinks; Captain Treford, the medical officer; Goggins, the stagehand; and Ensign Garfield. Chairs were brought to the centre of the stage and the men sat in a semi-circle, half facing the court and the audience.

Cork took up a position midway between them and unfurled all sails.

"The most disturbing thing about this case, gentlemen, is the patent assumption that the poison was meant for the Lieutenant and not for his sister. The assumption is supported by the further fancy that only Lieutenant Morgan knew of his sister's impersonation. But that is not true. I have here an affidavit from a Mistress Laura White, landlady to the Morgans. She swears she saw Betsy Morgan leave the house in the Juliet costume and knew it was not the Lieutenant."

"Why, that's pure rubbish," Brace said from his seat.

"Sir," Cork addressed the Colonel, "may I ask you to remind Captain Brace that he now serves as a witness and not a prosecutor, and that he has the right to cross-examine only when I am finished?"

The Colonel nodded, and

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Brace was fully aware that he was in a trap.

"To get on with it, then. If one witness swears she knew it was Betsy and not her brother on the way to the theatre that night, we may assume there could be others, and that opens up a new avenue."

"Excuse me, Captain Cork," the Colonel said, having passed the affidavit to the other panel members, "it says here that the landlady saw through the Juliet disguise because of the girl's walk."

"Actually, it was the way Betsy descended the stairs. The footfalls were light, and definitely not of a man. On seeing Betsy pass her door, she was surprised when she saw her in costume.

"So now we can go down the new avenue. If the poison was meant for the girl, who wished her dead? A jilted lover? Ensign Garfield has no real alibi for the evening in question. And who else was spurned by her? During the past ten days, I have spent many hours with the officers of this regiment, and can produce at least six names to fill the bill."

"All of them at the theatre, of course," Brace sneered.

"Only three, sir, and you among them. Yes, Captain, you cannot deny that Betsy Morgan was not unknown to you. It only supports my theory that several people had grievances against the girl. But I must admit it is Ensign Garfield who felt the sting of her fickleness most lately."

"My God, I couldn't touch a hair of her head," that young officer said with a catch in his throat.

"To be sure. Do you believe she really loved you, Garfield?"

"Yes, I do. If it weren't for her brother—"

"That is ridiculous," Morgan snapped. "She thought him a fool."

"I don't believe it, Lieutenant Morgan," Cork said, coming nearer to him. "I can put your landlady on this stand and she will swear that you and your sister had a rather loud argument over Ensign Garfield just two nights before the tragedy."

"Captain Cork," the Colonel interjected, "we seem to be drifting. What does it matter if the girl was or was not in love with Ensign Garfield?"

"I bring it up for several reasons, one being that it might be of some comfort to Ensign Garfield. Or pain, if he is the murderer. However, Betsy Morgan's feelings at the time of her death are the crux of this case."

"Well, I fail to see how they are," the Colonel said, with a puzzled look on his face. "We

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have a case of poisoning from a substance which could only have been introduced into the wine jug just before the performance, if Goggins the stagehand is to be believed. I think that excludes Garfield and all the others except the Keller woman, Captain."

"Oh, Goggins is telling the truth, Sir. He nipped from that bottle. Did you enjoy it, Goggins?"

The old rumpot broke into a smile and said, "One snort's the same as another, Sir."

"Yes, I imagine it would be, to your corrupted palate, my man." With this, Cork walked over to the panel table and took the jug of mulled wine which had been tagged as an exhibit. He uncorked it, smelled the contents, and walked back to where the medical officer sat in the semi-circle of witnesses.

"Quite deadly, eh, Captain Treford?"

The doctor turned his nose away. "I have already testified that the strength of the odor of bitter almonds indicates there is enough potassium cyanide in that to kill a regiment."

"And on this expert testimony rests the freedom of Tessie Keller, gentlemen. What rot!"

A woman screamed at the back of the hall as Cork raised the bottle to his mouth and drank deeply.

Captain Treford sprang to his feet and grabbed the bottle from Cork's hand. "Good Lord, man, quick! Sal soda! He has only minutes!"

"A lot longer than that, Captain." Cork laughed loudly, and my heart retreated from my mouth back to its rightful place. He started to take another swig, and then offered the bottle to Goggins, who shrank back in his chair.

"Not thirsty, Goggins? No mind, it isn't very good, since it is heavily laced with extract of bitter almonds. Don't look so confused, Doctor. You made the assumption that the smell of potassium cyanide on the girl's mouth was the same as the bitter almonds in the jug."

"Well, sir." The Colonel had resumed his seat. "That was quite a heroic gesture, but it compounds the issue. If the poison was not in the jug, how did she get it?"

I was muddled myself, and then it struck me. Suicide! The girl had taken her life in despair at losing Garfield. I was a bit proud that I had come to the conclusion before Cork voiced it on the Court.

"As for how she was given the poison, we will leave that problem for the moment, if you please, Sir. At this point, I could submit Mistress Keller's

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Not Guilty plea to the Court and find it would stand. But you, gentlemen, have been kind enough to put up with my idiosyncracies, and I did promise to name the real murderer. I shall now live up to my promise.

"To continue. We are now sure the poison was meant for the girl."

"Not necessarily, Cork," the Provost interrupted. "You haven't discovered how the poison was introduced. It still could have been meant for Morgan."

"I sincerely doubt it, Captain Brace."

"But who would want to murder my sister unless it was Garfield? The sneaking scoundrel." Morgan was on his feet and making for Garfield's throat when, with Cork's assistance, he was checked by Brace. The Colonel was using his table as if it were a drum, and finally he brought the hall to order.

Morgan was placed back in his chair and told to stay there.

"I can appreciate your remorse, Lieutenant Morgan. The man who killed your sister loved her very much; so much so that he could not bear to lose her. You, too, loved your sister, did you not?"

"But of course, in my own way."

"Tell me, do you spend every night at your rooms?"

"No, not when I am on the night watch."

"Then you are away a great deal?"

"Lieutenants do get most of the night duty."

"On these nights away from home, did your sister ever entertain gentlemen in your rooms?"

"Never. Anyone who says that is a liar."

"Correct. Your landlady will corroborate that. But this brings up a puzzlement. When I was visiting you the other day, I asked you which bedchamber was yours. Do you recall?"

"Yes, but what has this—"

"You will see in due time, Sir. The thing that puzzles me is that your landlady has occasion to change the sheets on your beds, and has always been confused as to who sleeps where, since she has found traces of your sister's long hair in both beds."

If it were not for the two soldiers restraining him, Morgan would have killed Cork, big as he is. We were all stunned—no one more so than the Colonel.

"Captain Cork," the Colonel said in a low tone that was almost seething with disgust, "you have introduced a loathesome insinuation which the Court will not tolerate. Incest is

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the most heinous of crimes, and requires more substantiation than the loose suspicions of a nosy landlady. I charge you, Sir, to either prove your statement or suffer the consequences."

"Sir, it is yourself who has introduced that word to this trial, not I. But I am not offended. May I call one more witness to resolve matters?"

The Colonel was turning purple with rage, but heeded some whispered advice from the officer on his right.

"Very well, Captain. I will indulge you one more time."

"Thank you, Sir. I call Corporal Franklin Tinker."

From the back of the hall a soldier of 24 years or so marched forward and went through all the folderol of saluting and foot-stamping. He was finally sworn and seated.

"Your name, rank, and station."

"Corporal Franklin Tinker, Sir, of the Royal Detachment at New York, Sir."

"How long have you been in the Colonies?"

"Just six months, Sir."

"Where are you from?"

"From Surrey, England, Sir."

Cork pointed to Morgan. "Do you recognise that man?"

"Yes, Sir, that's young Jim Morgan, he is. His father was the Squire in our parts."

"Do you know his sister?"

"I knew 'em both. Young Mary and poor Betsy."

"Poor Betsy. Why 'poor Betsy'?"

"Died of the humors, she did. Only sixteen, she was. Almost broke Squire Morgan's heart, it did."

"Well, if she is dead," Cork said, taking a miniature from his coat and showing it to the Corporal, "who is this?"

"Well, I'll be! That's Jenny Young. I heard from home she had run away to London. Came from real poor folk, she did, couldn't blame her for leaving."

The Squire insisted on planning the entire meal, and it was quite a feast. Huge bowls of pepperpot, succulent mutton chops, a great greens mixture of dock, fiddleheads laced with a pungent vinegar, and a new and delectable vegetable called brockala.

The original quartet was back together: Tell, the Squire, Cork, and myself.

"There are several points I'm not quite clear on, Cork," Squire Delaney said between mouthfuls. "First, how did the girl get the poison, and how did you know that Betsy, or Jenny, was Morgan's paramour or wife? Then there was all that theatrics with the wine jug."

"Hold, hold, Squire, one at a time. Brace has a full confes-

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sion, and Tell here has all the details. Let him fill you in."

"Well," Tell began, "Jenny Young did run away, but with Lieutenant Morgan, who was being sent to the Colonies. He had her impersonate his dead sister in order to get permission for her to come here with him. They played the brother and sister act, and Morgan actually had her flirt with other men to make the charade convincing. Morgan never dreamed she would meet someone and fall in love—but she found Garfield. Since they never married, she told Morgan that she was going to accept Garfield's offer of marriage. He then contrived the murder."

"But how did he get the poison in her?" I asked.

"As Cork implied, she took it herself. Morgan gave her a powder and told her it was a quietive that would help her relax during the scene at the tomb where Juliet is supposed to be sedated."

"Did you know there was no poison in the wine jug, Captain?"

"My dear Oaks, I have a flair for the dramatic, but I am not foolish. I persuaded one of my young officer cronies to get me a sample from the Provost Marshal's office, where it was kept. It didn't kill the innkeeper's dog, so it couldn't kill me."

"But why suspect Morgan in the first place?" Delaney wanted to know.

"If I accepted the theory that Betsy was killed by mistake, I had too many suspects. But, assuming that she was the real target, I had only one. Morgan was the only one who knew she was playing the role. It was an easier road."

"That's why you were so grateful for the ten-days' stay before the trial. So you could find someone from Surrey to identify Morgan and Jenny."

"Yes. Tell helped greatly there. That's the trouble with detection in the Colonies. Anyone's word is accepted, and it takes months to check it. So you are compelled to improvise."

"Like the landlady's 'affidavit' that she recognized Betsy leaving the house in Juliet's costume? And her 'testimony' that she found Betsy's hair in both beds?" Tell winked broadly.

"Well, the less said about all that the better. She *was* helpful in getting me the miniature," Cork said, taking it from his pocket. "A memento," he said, "with beauty's ensign yet crimson in her lips."

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a *NEW* Loren Mensing story by

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

Loren Mensing, university law professor, film buff, and amateur detective, finds himself deeply involved in Karmak Day—the day on which the home town of Stanford Ives Bennett, creator of Karmak the Mighty, celebrated Bennett's world-famous jungle-adventurer character—the day of festive Karmaktivities, including a murder in which "the only person who could be the murderer was also the only person who couldn't possibly be the murderer." Loren Mensing's special kind of case—about an old action movie and a new action murder . . .

THE IRONCLAD ALIBI

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

The tape recorder on the glass-topped coffee table played the voice of a woman, low and emotionless at first, then suddenly rising to a pitch of terror as if at the knowledge that within a few short seconds she would die. Loren Mensing sat hunched on the edge of the high-backed couch, the agony in that voice knifing through him. He tried to force his fatigue-deadened mind to concentrate on the facts of the murder and on three unanswered questions: whether he still had a client, whether the client had used him as a shield behind which to take another's life, and how it had come about that the only person who could be the murderer was also the only person who couldn't possibly be the murderer.

Twelve hours earlier, at 1:20 P.M., he had sat in a scoop of bright orange plastic and stared at the cloudless sky through the tinted panoramic window of the departure lounge. "Twenty minutes late," he muttered to the tall young chestnut-bearded man sitting next to him in the empty lounge. "Stomach any better?"

Brian Bennett shook his head

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and patted his lower right abdomen with infinite tenderness. "God, why did I order roast duck last night?" A jumbo jet taxied slowly past the floor-to-ceiling window amid the roar of other planes coming in for landings and the unintelligible squawks of the airport public-address system. This must be the one, Loren decided as he picked up the outsized paperback book from Brian's lap and opened it to a dog-eared page full of photographs, hoping Mr. William Wentworth would not look too different today from the way he had looked in the 1940s when he was directing Western movies and serials.

The access door was flung open, admitting a gust of chill wind and a horde of arriving travelers. Loren scanned each male face that passed by him. Finally he sprang up to intercept a fiftyish but still vigorous-looking man striding up the walkway. "Excuse me," Loren said. "Mr. Wentworth?"

"I'm the fellow," the other replied. His hair was thinning in the middle and graying along the edges, his belly thickening just a little, but an unquenchable devilish delight in being alive and active shone in his eyes, and Loren liked him at once.

"I'm Professor Mensing from City University Law School." He held out his hand eagerly. "It's a great pleasure to meet you. I was one of your fans back in the Forties just like every other kid in America who went to the movies on Saturday afternoons."

A glint of puzzlement crossed the director's work-seamed face. "Could I ask how a law professor got himself involved in Karmak Day?"

The bearded young man eased himself out of the glob of plastic on which he had been sitting. "He's my attorney, Mr. Wentworth, on some negotiations I'm having with my stepsister. I'm Brian Bennett. Everybody else is tied up on one Karmaktivity or another this afternoon, so we volunteered to drive in and meet your plane." He held out a hand weakly. "Hope you had a smooth flight from L.A. Sorry I'm in such rotten shape but it must have been something I ate last night."

"Or drank?" Wentworth suggested amiably; and Loren recalled what the outsized paperback had said about the high-living escapades that had earned William Wentworth the nickname of Wild Bill. The three men walked up the corridor to the airport's hub, Wentworth refusing to let Loren carry his suitcase, Brian bringing up the rear.

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"You know, Professor," Wild Bill remarked as they rode the escalator to the parking decks, "I was pretty puzzled when Miss, what was her name, Erika Bennett wrote me that letter care of the Screen Directors' Guild a few weeks ago and asked me to come out here and give a talk at this Karmak wingding tonight. As long as my expenses and an honorarium are paid I'm glad to help out, but to be honest all I know about Karmak and Stanford Ives Bennett you could write on the head of a pin."

"But you directed the serial *Karmak Beneath the Earth–*"

"I made that stinkeroo in 1940," Wentworth cut in as he threw his battered overnighter into the well of Loren's Volkswagen. "I was a stupid kid only twenty-three years old and I made that picture just like I've made two or three hundred since then and when I finished it I went home and killed a quart of Scotch and burned the script. I've never read a Karmak book in my life and I doubt if I ever will—no offense, Mr. Bennett." He waited until Brian had settled in to the back seat before he strapped himself into the front passenger seat beside Loren.

"That's all right. Actually I'm not—" Brian winced as Loren spun the wheel hard right onto the Interstate heading west for the township of Monroe. "Karmak never turned me on all that much either," Brian continued. "My bag is movies. I was the one who found the print we're screening tonight at the Civic Center before your talk. The first three and the last three chapters of *Karmak Beneath the Earth,* hidden away in that French archive all these years."

Now it was the director's turn to wince. "Son," he said, "you should have let 'em stay buried. The picture stinks."

"It's great!" Brian shouted. "It's a huge audiovisual fireworks display—action, action and more action. All your pictures are like that!"

And so they argued spiritedly while Loren kept the VW at the legal 55 mph on the way to the small town which Stanford Ives Bennett had called home. The night before, in his motel room, Loren had read *Karmak Before the Cameras,* the outsized paperback which now lay on the back seat beside Brian. It was an unpretentious nostalgia-oriented moviebook in which every other page was devoted to still photos, including the one of Wentworth as a young man from which Loren had identified him. The text recounted the history of the film adaptations of Stanford Ives

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Bennett's world-famous jungle-adventurer character from the first Karmak silent movie back in 1922 through a string of high-budget features during the Thirties and Forties and ending with the recent TV series based on the same character.

The author had given short shrift to Republic Pictures' 1940 12-chapter serial *Karmak Beneath the Earth* since at the time he wrote no prints of the chapterplay had been known to exist. The contract between Republic and Stanford Ives Bennett had given the studio the right to exhibit the serial for five years only, and at the end of that period every known print had been recalled and destroyed. By all reports, the book stated, *Karmak Beneath the Earth* had had very little to do with Bennett's conception of his character; the writers and the director, an inexperienced but maniacally energetic youth named William Wentworth, had turned the film into a simple-minded science-fiction Western set in a Rome-like empire within the earth's core.

"Now don't forget I never met your father and never read his books," Wentworth pointed out to Brian, twisting half around in the high backed seat, "so tell me anything I should know about your family to keep from sounding stupid tonight."

"Stanford wasn't my father," Brian said, "and actually I hardly knew him. His first wife died in 1925 giving birth to Erika. He married my mother in 1949—she was a World War II widow—and adopted me. Then both Mom and Stanford died in a plane crash in '54."

Loren swung off the Interstate onto a two-lane county road as Brian continued the capsule biography of his foster father. "When he was laid up in that military hospital in 1918 he dreamed up Karmak the Mighty and that whole science-fiction ancient-history world as a sort of therapy. And eventually those dreams made him so much money that he set up Stanford Ives Bennett, Incorporated, and transferred all the rights in his work to the company. Magazine serializations, fabulous hardcover sales, movie rights, foreign rights, paperbacks—he made a mint, and taxes were a lot lower then too. But he'd been born and raised in Monroe and stayed loyal to the town, and Erika still runs the business from the house where we all lived."

Loren made a left onto the main street of Monroe. "Stanford Ives Bennett would have been seventy-five years old today," he said, "which is why the mayor and town council decided to make it Karmak Day.

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They paid Brian's way from New York and yours from L.A. Brian knew me from when he tried law school for one semester a few years back, and asked me to join him here and negotiate with his stepsister for the sale of his interest in Stanford Ives Bennett enterprises."

"Stanford's will left a half interest apiece to Erika and me," Brian said, "but provided that when one of us dies the other takes the dead one's half. We were his only living relatives and he wanted to make sure Karmak stayed in the family, I guess. But I've never had any interest in running a business, so I've let Erika and her people do the work while I take half of the profits and go around the world studying whatever turns me on."

"Your stepsister must love you," Wentworth remarked, as Loren turned into the grounds of the Holiday Haven. "Well, what's our schedule?"

"A cocktail party at the Bennett house at four," Loren told him, pulling into a parking slot, "then we'll take you to dinner. The screening begins at eight and your talk should start around ten thirty."

"I can hardly wait," William Wentworth said politely as he unbelted himself.

After the director had checked in and gone to his room for some rest, Loren returned to his own room and spread the Bennett file out on the bed, reviewing certain financial figures. So far the bargaining had proceeded smoothly, but Loren knew from his time in the active practice of law before accepting his professorship that until all parties had signed all agreements, literally anything could wreck a deal. He had once seen a corporate merger collapse at the last minute because one man had taken a violent dislike to the shade of another's necktie.

So Loren reread the last three years' financial statements, and noted again the impressive revenue the corporation had derived from TV residuals, product tie-ins, new foreign editions of the Karmak novels, and a host of other sources of income. Erika Bennett, he concluded, was a born businesswoman, and he had no compunction about charging Brian a substantial fee for representing him in the negotiations, especially since he'd be donating most of it anonymously to the law school's scholarship fund for minority students.

At 3:30 he collected Brian and Wentworth for the drive to the cocktail party at the Bennett mansion. Brian felt no bet-

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ter, and by the time Loren turned the VW between the twin stone pillars and into the long curving private drive that led to the house, the young man's face was almost white with intermittent pain. Loren congratulated himself that he had not been tempted by the roast duck last night.

The casuals had drifted out and the few remaining guests sat or stood in tiny clusters. Loren was afraid that if he put down his vodka-and-tonic anywhere in the immense study he would be desecrating something priceless. Framed illustrations of Karmak from old pulp-magazine covers cluttered the oak-paneled walls, and built-in bookshelves on both sides of the fieldstone fireplace housed hundreds of editions of the Karmak novels. Exotically carved tables dotted the room, and heavy statuary filled the tops of the tables. Loren sat on a long high-backed couch beside dandyish Vandyke-bearded Jules Dodd, the Bennett Corporation's legal adviser.

"That's right," Dodd insisted in a raspy whisper which told its own story of why he had chosen legal officework rather than courtroom practice. "Every business conversation Erika has over her office phone, she records. She's got a tape recorder in her desk and a foot pedal that can turn it on in two seconds, and she keeps all the tapes in a file cabinet arranged alphabetically by the name of the person on the other end. That way she says there can never be any confusion over what is or isn't agreed to when she's making a deal over the phone."

Glancing across the room Loren noticed Brian Bennett absently hefting a solid bronze bust of Karmak before returning it to its wall niche. In another corner Wild Bill Wentworth sat on a low sofa intimately close to tall honey-haired Kathryn Crowell, Erika Bennett's administrative assistant, and Loren did not need much imagination to think of one more reason why the director had been called Wild Bill. Meanwhile Erika herself, silver-coiffed and silver-sheathed, darted about among the last few knots of guests, chain-smoking, bursting with nervous energy, until finally only the mayor of Monroe and a few township dignitaries were left and even they were being politely but inexorably swept toward the front door.

When Erika returned from seeing the politicos out, only Loren, Wentworth, Brian, Dodd, and Ms. Crowell were left sitting in the study. Behind

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the elaborate bar plump burbling Maynard Ferguson, the corporate treasurer and accountant and bartender for the afternoon, was rearranging bottles and glasses with infinite precision as if they were items in a profit-and-loss statement.

Erika clapped her hands sharply for attention. "Well, people," she announced, "it is after five, and the screening begins at eight. I never eat supper myself but I'm sure you will all want to have something before we reassemble at the Civic Center."

"I suppose that's a gentle hint the party's over," Brian Bennett commented to Loren. "I can't eat anything with these damn gut pains, so just drop me off at the motel and I'll try to sleep them away."

"I'll join you for dinner, Professor, if you don't mind," Wentworth said. "Thought I'd have the little lady join us," he nodded back in the direction of Kathryn Crowell who was collecting used cocktail glasses from tables, "but she turned me down! Maybe I'm getting too old for these games." But the devilish glow still shone in his eyes.

"Mr. Wentworth," Loren said, "you will never be too old for these games."

By 5:30 the VW with Loren, Wentworth, and Brian had swung out of the private drive and was headed back toward the Holiday Haven. They dropped Brian off at 5:50. "Look, don't bother to pick me up," he insisted, "I'll take a cab to the Civic Center if I feel up to it."

Then Loren and Wentworth drove around hunting for a restaurant that was not full of Karmak fans who had come to Monroe for the festivities. They found a steak house on the Interstate, and over prime T-bone they lit the lamp of memory, recalling the great action films Loren had seen as a boy. As eight o'clock approached they lifted their Irish coffees in a final toast—"to the golden age of the movie that *moved*"—and paid their checks.

They were late arriving at the Civic Center but as they walked up the aisle of the crowded auditorium to the front row that had been reserved for the Bennett family and its guests, they found they were not the only ones late. Plump Maynard Ferguson sat alone in the front row, scowling like a bullfrog disturbed in its pond, his excess poundage spilling over the edges of the folding chair on which he sat.

"Where is Miss Bennett?" he demanded of the newcomers in his bullfrog croak. "Where is Miss Crowell? Where is Mr. Dodd?"

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"We don't have them," Wentworth protested. "What's going on here?"

The august mayor of Monroe chose this moment to stride self-importantly down the aisle, forcing Loren and Wentworth to scurry to seats. The muted thunder of conversation among the audience fell to a whisper as the highest elected official of the township magisterially adjusted the microphone on the lectern to his diminutive height and began his welcoming remarks.

"My fellow citizens and guests and visitors to our city and friends of Karmak the Mighty!" he squeaked. "Welcome to the first screening in almost thirty years of a film whose showing marks the climax of this festive day—the only cliffhanger serial ever based on the exploits of the immortal character created by America's beloved storyteller, Stanford Ives Bennett. *Karmak Beneath the Earth* was long believed to be totally lost, but last year a French-subtitled print of the first three and the last three chapters was discovered in Paris by Mr. Brian Bennett, the adopted son of our city's most distinguished personage."

The mayor raised his eyes from his notes and seemed shocked to notice that the front row of the auditorium was virtually empty. "And after the screening the director, Mr. William, ah, Wentforth, will tell us about the making of this incomparable, ah yes," the mayor trailed off, as the lights in the huge room snapped out and the screen lit up.

Even with the middle six chapters missing, the story of Karmak's descent into the earth's core and his involvement with the slave-girl Tasmura's attempt to foment a revolt against the corrupt rulers of the underground kingdom were easy to follow; and the hysterically paced action never slackened for a minute. Loren loved this kind of movie. He sat with his eyes riveted to the screen, and did not notice until the reels were being changed that Wild Bill Wentworth had fallen asleep beside him.

Shortly after 10:30 THE END flashed triumphantly across the screen and Loren shook the director awake before the lights could come on. "You're at bat," he whispered. Wentworth blinked in the harsh light and shambled bear-like to the lectern where he began to reminisce dreamily about the making of the serial.

Loren craned around for a minute to watch the audience reaction to Wentworth. The director's simplicity and com-

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plete lack of pretense had turned the people on already. But in the back of the auditorium Loren noticed a huddle of uniformed men, with the small self-important figure of the mayor among them. And suddenly Loren remembered the strange emptiness of the front row.

A brisk question-and-answer session followed Wentworth's talk. "Who doubled for Karmak in the stunts?" A voice wheezed from the middle of the room.

"That was Dino Sarpi," Wentworth said, "the greatest stuntman of all time and the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet."

A pale-blonde co-ed raised her hand. "Sometimes an actor's voice seemed to—well, to change in the middle of a sequence. Why was that, Mr. Wentworth?"

"Either he was drunk and blew some lines, or maybe an airplane was passing overhead. We'd have someone read those lines into the soundtrack later on but once in a while the voices didn't match a hundred percent. Remember, serials were made for pre-teenagers who weren't supposed to notice things like that."

"Who did the stunts for Tasmura?" someone asked.

"Why, that was also Dino Sarpi," Wentworth replied. He paused for just the right moment. "And if you ask me, his legs were nicer than Tasmura's." The crowd exploded with laughter. It was near midnight before the last question had been fielded and the last Karmak enthusiast had left the auditorium.

Then the knot of uniformed men strode down the aisle to the lectern.

"Mr. Ferguson?" A heavy-set gray-haired man approached the fat accountant. "Chief of Police Wade. There's been some trouble at the Bennett house. Miss Erika Bennett was murdered a few hours ago. We know who did it, so we didn't want to upset anyone by breaking up the screening."

"Murdered?" Ferguson croaked dazedly.

"I'm Professor Mensing of City University Law School," Loren introduced himself to the police chief. "I've had some criminal experience when I was deputy legal adviser to the Commissioner's office in the city. Can I help?"

"Mensing, yeah, I'm supposed to get you too," Wade said. "I don't know if you can help or not but you're sure as hell involved."

"What are you talking about?" Loren demanded.

"It was the person you represent that did it," the chief

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stated flatly. "The only thing is, he's also the only person who couldn't possibly have done it!"

And so at 1:30 in the morning Loren sat once again on the high-backed couch in the Bennett study, listening to the last moments in a woman's life. Detective Sergeant Regan bent over the glass-topped coffee table and thumbed the Stop button on the portable tape recorder. "Want to hear it again?" He was a rangy rawboned professional and his eyes were bleary with fatigue and puzzlement.

"No more," Loren said. "This machine isn't the one she had connected to her office phone?"

"That's right. We found this one in the office closet. But the tape *was* in the recorder she had hooked up to the phone, and it's her voice, and you heard her last words as clear as I did. 'Oh, my God! Brian! Don't kill me!'"

"I heard them," Loren said.

"And you never mentioned to Brian that Dodd had told you the phone was bugged?"

"That's right, I never did," Loren said.

"So Brian would have no way of knowing her last words were on tape."

"But, Sergeant, he'd know there was someone on the other end of that phone—the person Miss Bennett was talking to. It's absurd to think he would have gone through with any plan to kill her after she had just named him over the phone!"

"Uh uh." The sergeant shook his head wearily. "He had sneaked into the office behind her with that bust of Karmak lifted, ready to brain her, and when she sensed him behind her and called out his name it was just too late for him to stop. That's the way we reconstruct it. He hired you to come out here and represent him, pretending he wanted to dispose of his rights in the old man's estate as a cover so that he could kill his stepsister and inherit all the rights to Karmak under the old man's will. He used you as a patsy, Professor. And you've done enough favors for the cops in the city so that I don't want you to get sucked into defending him on a murder rap."

"Your thoughtfulness overwhelms me," Loren murmured, "especially since your case against him is full of holes. How about running over the facts again?"

Sergeant Regan flipped back several pages in his pocket notebook. "Jules Dodd called headquarters from his house at 6:52 P.M. The Crowell woman was with him. Personally I

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think they've got a thing going between them but that's neither here nor there. Dodd reported that he had just gotten a phone call from Erika Bennett and that she was going over some routine item of business with him when all of a sudden she let out this scream and said, 'Oh, my God! Brian! Don't kill me!' And then Dodd said there was a sort of splattering crash sound, and then someone on the other end hung up.

"So Dodd called headquarters right away. A squad car got up here at 7:19. The officers found the front door unlocked, went in, searched the place, and found Miss Bennett behind her desk in her office down the hall with her skull cracked open and that bronze bust of Karmak on the floor next to her.

"I caught the squeal in the Detective Division, picked up Dodd and the Crowell woman and got out here in a hurry. Dodd told me about the office phone being bugged, we pulled the reel of tape from the recorder and the last thing on it was just what Dodd had described.

"Dodd and Crowell both identified Miss Bennett's voice. It becomes sort of shrill and distorted near the end but that's only natural when she looked up and saw death staring her in the face. Ferguson and Wentworth both identified the voice as Miss Bennett's when we played the tape for them in the other room."

"Wentworth hardly heard the woman," Loren protested. "They just met this afternoon. His identification isn't worth a damn."

"Aw come *on*, Professor, every single one of the three people who worked with Erika Bennett day in and day out says it's her voice!"

Loren saw that he was not scoring any points for the bearded young man who might or might not be his client. "Go on with what happened," he said.

"Dodd told me that you and Brian and Wentworth were staying at the Holiday Haven, so I sent a squad car to see if he was still there. The patrolmen found his room empty but all his clothes were hanging up and his suitcase was there and his prints were all over. So they brought a few of his personal effects up here and the fingerprint boys compared the prints on them with the prints on the murder weapon and they matched—"

"And I've already told you that Brian examined that bust right here this afternoon during the party!" Loren broke in.

"Which doesn't mean he couldn't have handled it again

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later," the sergeant countered grimly. "With those prints, and the tape, and what Dodd told us about Stanford Ives Bennett's will, we've got a damn good case against him, and by God we're not going to let him get away with murder just because he rigged himself an alibi!"

Loren sprang from the couch and began to pace back and forth past the detective. "You're sure of the time he was admitted?"

"Look," Regan repeated impatiently. "The squad car boys asked the desk clerk at the Holiday Haven if he'd seen Brian Bennett leaving. The clerk picked up the house phone and called the hotel doctor. Dr. Perrin came down and said he'd gotten a ring from the clerk a couple minutes before seven to go to Brian Bennett's room. Brian had just called the clerk and said he was about to bust with a pain in his gut. Perrin went to the room, did a quick examination, and called for an ambulance. Brian was admitted to Monroe General Hospital at 7:37 and operated on for acute appendicitis immediately, and the timing was so close the appendix burst in the surgeon's hands as he was pulling it out.

"Now you tell me how your boy did the magic act, Professor. How did he kill his stepsister at just before 6:50 and get all the way back to his hotel room in time to be examined by the doctor about five minutes later?"

A squad car dropped Loren and Wentworth at the motel shortly after 3:00 A.M. Loren called the hospital from a pay phone in the lobby and learned that Brian was asleep under sedation with two uniformed men outside the door of his room. He hung up and trudged over to Wentworth. "I'm too exhausted to sleep," he said. "How about you, Bill?"

"I bought a bottle from Room Service when I checked in," Wentworth told him. "You get some ice and I'll bring the booze down to your room."

And so they drank, Loren asprawl on his bed and Wentworth in a reclining chair, as the sun began to turn the horizon pale rose. For the ninth time Loren went over the rough timetable he had constructed at the Bennett house on the basis of Sergeant Regan's account, the testimony of Kathryn Crowell and Jules Dodd, and his own recollections.

5:25 P.M. WW, BB, and I leave house. Drop BB at motel 5:50. (Note: Regan has established that drive from house to motel cannot be done in less than 15 min.) WW and I find

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place to eat, arrive at Civic Center 8:15.

5:30 P.M. Ferguson leaves house. Says he went directly to Larsson's Smorgasbord for supper. Was seen there by several witnesses between 6:30 and 7:15. Says he went straight from Larsson's to Civic Center, arriving shortly before 8:00.

5:30 P.M. Dodd leaves house. Drives to own home in own car, arriving, he says, around 6:00.

6:00 P.M. Kathryn Crowell, having finished cleaning up the study after the party, drives in own car to Dodd's house, arriving, she says, around 6:35. (Are they lovers? Is it important if they are?)

6:50 P.M. Dodd is called by Erika, who cries out, *Oh, my God! Brian! Don't kill me!* At this moment WW and I are eating; Ferguson is supposedly eating.

6:52 P.M. Dodd reports murder to police.

6:58 P.M. Dr. Perrin finds Brian in his room at Holiday Haven with appendix about to burst.

If Brian had had an invisible private helicopter, he could just about have managed it, Loren thought. He peered over at Wild Bill Wentworth, who was snoring lightly in the reclining chair. "Hey, king of the serial directors," he called.

"Whazzat?"

"You did a couple of those flying superhero pictures back in the Forties and made it look as if the hero was flying through the air. Any way Brian could have flown to and from the house like that?"

"All done with wirezh," Wentworth mumbled. "Stupid queshun."

But a little later, listening to the director's gentle snoring, Loren recalled something else Wild Bill Wentworth had said. And that was when he knew the answer.

In Sergeant Regan's closet-sized cubicle at the police station a few hours later, fortified by several cups of black coffee, Loren tried to explain. "You have to start," he said, "with the assumption that what is physically impossible could not have happened. Brian Bennett is no more guilty of murder than the man in the moon. Now don't interrupt for a few minutes and let's see where this assumption leads us.

"There are three main pieces of evidence against Brian: he had the only economic motive, his victim apparently named him with her dying breath, and his fingerprints were on the bust of Karmak. Now let's look at that last item in the light of our assumption. If somone was framing Brian,

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how could that someone have just happened to pick as the murder weapon an object which just happened to have Brian's prints on it? Entirely too much coincidence. The murderer must have seen Brian hefting the Karmak bust. Which means the murderer must have been at the cocktail party yesterday afternoon when Brian picked up the bust."

Sergeant Regan, frowning, crossed his ankles on the edge of his desk and leaned back as far as his swivel chair would let him.

"Now," Loren went on, "let's examine the 6:50 P.M. phone call from Erika to Dodd. Don't you find something odd in that call? Erika had seen Dodd all day, would have seen him again at the Civic Center in a little more than an hour, would have seen him all the next day—and suddenly she calls him at home to go over some completely routine item of business!"

"But, damn it, the call exists!" Regan insisted. "It's on tape!"

"What is on the tape," Loren said, "is words. There's nothing on the tape that proves *who* said those words or *when*. And stored away in the Bennett house, don't forget, are hundreds of routine business conversations that Erika Bennett had taped over the years.

"Let me tell you what I think happened. X, the murderer, waited until Jules Dodd had a chance to get home. X located a conversation between Erika and Dodd in the files, a conversation general and routine enough, at least for the first several seconds, to have taken place last night. X dialed Dodd, turned on a portable tape recorder—probably the same one on which you played the tape for me—kicked the foot-pedal under Erika's desk, and thereby transferred to the desk recorder an earlier recording of Erika's voice speaking about some routine business matter.

"Then at a certain point X turned off the portable tape recorder and switched to live action, screaming 'Oh, my God! Brian! Don't kill me!' in a good imitation of Erika's voice."

"And then?" Sergeant Regan demanded.

"And then X picked up the bust of Karmak and brained Erika Bennett with it—having stunned her first, no doubt—while the desk recorder was still running."

The sergeant sprang erect and his chair squeaked like a tortured mouse.

"And then," Loren went on, "X drove to Jules Dodd's place, and they went over their story, and then Dodd called the police, claiming the call from Erika

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had been made just two minutes before."

"Kathryn Crowell," the grizzled sergeant breathed.

"It has to be. She and Dodd are partners. They'd heard Brian say he'd be asleep in his motel room for a couple of hours, figured he would be completely without an alibi if they timed the murder and frameup just right. They must have been looking for months for a smooth way of killing Erika and pinning it on Brian. When they noticed him picking up that bust, and heard him say he needed some sleep, they had it. Only the plan backfired when Brian's stomach pain turned out to be appendicitis and gave him an alibi so ironclad that the contradiction between it and the ironclad case they had made against him drove us all up the wall."

"But they have no motive," Regan pointed out. "They don't inherit anything under the will."

"I don't think they wanted formal ownership," Loren said. "They wanted *control*. If Brian were convicted of his stepsister's murder he would not be allowed to inherit from her because the law doesn't allow a killer to inherit from his victim. There are no other known Bennett relatives. Whoever wound up with Erika's fifty percent, the thing would be in the courts for years, and meanwhile Dodd and Miss Crowell would be running the show, siphoning off as much as they could. Maybe they even had plans to hire someone to pose as a twelfth cousin of Stanford Ives Bennett and claim Erika's half interest."

"Okay," the sergeant said. "You haven't proved your case but at least it's plausible. What made you suspect them?"

"Something Bill Wentworth mentioned during the question-and-answer session after last night's screening, about how serial directors sometimes had to interpolate fluffed lines of dialogue into the soundtrack after the picture was completed. I tied that together with the sudden change in pitch of the voice on the tape when it cries out, 'Oh, my God! Brian! Don't kill me!' That was the point where the switch was made from Erika's earlier recorded voice to live action.

"Ferguson with his bullfrog croak and Dodd with his stage whisper couldn't have done a woman's voice that well. But another woman could. Get that tape analyzed by a lab and you should get proof that part of it came from another tape and the rest from a different voice."

That afternoon Loren took a

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long deep nap from which he was awakened by a phone call. "Regan here. You were right. The lab report confirmed it and Dodd and Crowell were booked a little while ago. They'll each talk the other into life sentences if you ask me."

"Any word on Brian's condition?" Loren asked groggily.

"He's resting easy. Doesn't even know how close he came to being charged with murder."

After dinner Loren and Wild Bill Wentworth drove to the hospital to see how the bearded young man was doing. There was no police guard at his door.

"Hi," the patient said weakly from his bed. "How did the serial go last night?"

"It's a stinker," Wentworth replied.

"There was a lot more action offscreen," Loren said.

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EDGAR ALLAN POE

(1809-1849)

Edgar Allan Poe died on October 7, 1849. This issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is on sale during October 1974—exactly 125 years after the death of the acknowledged inventor of the detective story. To mark the event we are giving you one of Edgar Allan Poe's less known stories (undeservedly less known), as we presented it, with a foreword and an afterword, in the Ellery Queen anthology titled POETIC JUSTICE: *23 Stories of Crime, Mystery, and Detection by World-Famous Poets from Geoffrey Chaucer to Dylan Thomas . . .*

Most of us are familiar with the recurring and seemingly inescapable tragedies in Edgar Allan Poe's life. For the second half of his nearly forty-one years he lived in shadow and darkness—the shadow of fear, the darkness of nightmare, alternating between anguish and despair, usually in unbelievable poverty and nearly always in profound misery. He was a tortured and tormented man, a haunted man who "still haunts our memory and our literature." He was possibly a dipsomaniac, possibly a maniac; he was either neglected or vilified, and certainly misunderstood; he was a failure in his own time—the highest salary he was ever paid as an editor was at the rate of $800 a year, and his stories earned so little that a single letter by Poe of even small literary interest is now likely to fetch at auction more than Poe earned in his entire literary career; indeed, some of Poe's books were published without royalties to him, his only payment having been "twenty copies for distribution to friends,"[1] and today first editions of his *Tamerlane and Other Poems (1827), Poems* (1831), and *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) are rare and precious books . . .

[1]*Quoted from Poe's letter of August 13, 1841, to his Philadelphia publishers, Lea & Blanchard.*

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Is it any wonder that his morbidity and maladjustments, his persistent "evil fortune," caused him mental, physical, and emotional breakdowns? Yet his short life was one of intense creativity, full of imagination, originality, and otherworldliness. George Bernard Shaw called him "this finest of finest of artists," and Poe's influence, both as a creator and a critic, has been immeasurable . . .

The great problem in selecting a Poe story for this anthology was to choose one not already well-known to readers. For poets such as Chaucer, Longfellow, Whitman, Masefield, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Dylan Thomas we had no problem of choice: each wrote only one story in the crime-mystery field. But with Poe, the acknowledged inventor of the detective story, we had a true embarrassment of riches. The natural selection would have been a tale of C. Auguste Dupin—"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (historically the most important, since it was the world's first detective story in a modern sense), or "The Purloined Letter" (Poe's finest balance of the two great 'tec tributaries—the "Intellectual" and the "Sensational"), or "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (which shows how Poe applied his new literary technique to the solution of a real-life case and which, in the opinion of so discerning a professional as Rex Stout, is not only Poe's outstanding achievement in the genre but also one of the ten best detective stories ever written). But all three Dupin stories have been anthologized numerous times.

A non-Dupin story? "The Gold-Bug" and even "Thou Art the Man" are also too familiar. One of Poe's tales of murder? Who does not know "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," even that lesser favorite, "Hop-Frog"?

No, for this anthology we needed something "different." So we dug into Poe's relatively "unknown" stories and we came up with a "discovery"—a story by Poe whose detective-crime significance has been unaccountably overlooked. The story is "The Man of the Crowd," and of it the perceptive and penetrating Philip Van Doren Stern has written: "It is one of Poe's least appreciated stories. It is almost never commented on in

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any critical review of his work, yet is one of his most unusual stories, curiously modern in its psychology, and far more original than some of his better-known tales."

And even Mr. Stern did not realize, or fully realize; the story's importance in the history of the detective story!

Further comments after you have read this "unhonored and unsung" tale—a tale of unusual "detection" . . .

THE MAN OF THE CROWD

by EDGAR ALLAN POE

Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul.
LA BRUYERE.

It was well said of a certain German book that "*es lässt sich nicht lesen*"—it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged.

Not long ago, about the closing in of an evening in autumn, I sat at the large bow window of the D—— Coffee-House in London. For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui*—moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision departs—the ἀχλὺς ἡ πρὶν ἐπῆεν —and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its every-day condition as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias.

Merely to breathe was enjoyment; and I derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain. I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in everything. With a cigar in

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my mouth and a newspaper in my lap, I had been amusing myself for the greater part of the afternoon, now in poring over advertisements, now in observing the promiscuous company in the room, and now in peering through the smoky panes into the street.

This latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momently increased; and by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance.

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and overdone smile upon the lips, the course of the person impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.

There was nothing very distinctive about these two large classes beyond what I have noted. Their habiliments belonged to that order which is pointedly termed the decent. They were undoubtedly noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stockjobbers—the Eupatrids and the commonplaces of society—men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own—conducting

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business upon their own responsibility. They did not greatly excite my attention.

The tribe of clerks was an obvious one; and here I discerned two remarkable divisions. There were the junior clerks of flash houses—young gentlemen with tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips. Setting aside a certain dapperness of carriage, which may be termed *deskism* for want of a better word, the manner of these persons seemed to me an exact facsimile of what had been the perfection of *bon ton* about twelve or eighteen months before. They wore the cast-off graces of the gentry;—and this, I believe, involves the best definition of the class.

The division of the upper clerks of staunch firms, or of the "steady old fellows," it was not possible to mistake. These were known by their coats and pantaloons of black or brown, made to sit comfortably, with white cravats and waistcoats, broad solid-looking shoes, and thick hose or gaiters.—They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of an ancient pattern. Theirs was the affectation of respectability;—if indeed there be an affectation so honorable.

There were many individuals of dashing appearance, whom I easily understood as belonging to the race of swell pickpockets, with which all great cities are infested. I watched these gentry with much inquisitiveness, and found it difficult to imagine how they should ever be mistaken for gentlemen by gentlemen themselves. Their voluminousness of wristband, with an air of excessive frankness, should betray them at once.

The gamblers, of whom I descried not a few, were still more easily recognizable. They wore every variety of dress, from that of the desperate thimble-rig bully, with velvet waistcoat, fancy neckerchief, gilt chains, and filigreed buttons, to that of the scrupulously inornate clergyman than which nothing could be less liable to suspicion. Still all were distinguished by a certain sodden swarthiness of complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip. There were two other traits, moreover, by which I could always detect them—a guarded lowness of tone in conversation, and a more than ordinary extension of the thumb in a direction at right angles with the fingers.

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Very often, in company with these sharpers, I observed an order of men somewhat different in habits, but still birds of a kindred feather. They may be defined as the gentlemen who live by their wits. They seem to prey upon the public in two battalions—that of the dandies and that of the military men. Of the first grade the leading features are long locks and smiles; of the second frogged coats and frowns.

Descending in the scale of what is termed gentility, I found darker and deeper themes for speculation. I saw peddlers, with hawk eyes flashing from countenances whose every other feature wore only an expression of abject humility; sturdy professional street beggars scowling upon mendicants of a better stamp, whom despair alone had driven forth into the night for charity; feeble and ghastly invalids, upon whom death had placed a sure hand, and who sidled and tottered through the mob, looking everyone beseechingly in the face, as if in search of some chance consolation, some lost hope; modest young girls returning from long and late labor to a cheerless home, and shrinking more tearfully than indignantly from the glances of ruffians, whose direct contact, even, could not be avoided; women of the town of all kinds and of all ages—the unequivocal beauty in the prime of her womanhood, putting one in mind of the statue in Lucian, with the surface of Parian marble, and the interior filled with filth; the loathsome and utterly lost leper in rags—the wrinkled, bejeweled, and paint-begrimed beldame, making a last effort at youth—the mere child of immature form, yet, from long association, an adept in the dreadful coquetries of her trade, and burning with a rabid ambition to be ranked the equal of her elders in vice; drunkards innumerable and indescribable—some in shreds and patches, reeling, inarticulate, with bruised visage and lack-luster eyes—some in whole although filthy garments, with a slightly unsteady swagger, thick sensual lips, and hearty-looking rubicund faces—others clothed in materials which had once been good, and which even now were scrupulously well brushed—men who walked with a more than naturally firm and springy step, but whose countenances were fearfully pale, whose eyes were hideously wild and red, and who clutched with quivering fingers, as they strode through the crowd, at every object which came within their reach; beside these, piemen, porters, coal-heavers,

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sweeps; organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors, and ballad-mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye.

As the night deepened, so deepened to me the interest of the scene; for not only did the general character of the crowd materially alter (its gentler features retiring in the gradual withdrawal of the more orderly portion of the people, and its harsher ones coming out into bolder relief as the late hour brought forth every species of infamy from its den), but the rays of the gaslamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over everything a fitful and garish luster. All was dark yet splendid—as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian.

The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in their brief interval of a glance, the history of long years.

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age)—a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Anything even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retszch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnation of the fiend.

As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of extreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated.

"How wild a history," I said to myself, "is written within that bosom!"

Then came a craving desire

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to keep the man in view—to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take; for he had already disappeared. With some little difficulty I at length came within sight of him, approached, and followed him closely, yet cautiously, so as not to attract his attention.

I had now a good opportunity of examining his person. He was short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble. His clothes, generally, were filthy and ragged; but as he came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp, I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaure* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger. These observations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go.

It was now fully nightfall, and a thick humid fog hung over the city, soon ending in a settled and heavy rain. This change of weather had an odd effect upon the crowd, the whole of which was at once put into new commotion, and overshadowed by a world of umbrellas. The waver, the jostle, and the hum increased in a tenfold degree. For my own part I did not much regard the rain—the lurking of an old fever in my system rendering the moisture somewhat too dangerously pleasant. Tying a handkerchief about my mouth, I kept on.

For half an hour the old man held his way with difficulty along the great thoroughfare; and I here walked close at his elbow through fear of losing sight of him. Never once turning his head to look back, he did not observe me. By and by he passed into a cross street which, although densely filled with people, was not quite so much thronged as the main one he had quitted. Here a change in his demeanor became evident. He walked more slowly and with less object than before—more hesitatingly. He crossed and re-crossed the way repeatedly without apparent aim; and the press was still so thick that, at every such movement, I was obliged to follow him closely.

The street was a narrow and long one, and his course lay within it for nearly an hour, during which the passengers had gradually diminished to about that number which is ordinarily seen at noon in

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Broadway near the Park—so vast a difference is there between a London populace and that of the most frequented American city. A second turn brought us into a square, brilliantly lighted, and overflowing with life. The old manner of the stranger reappeared. His chin fell upon his breast, while his eyes rolled wildly from under his knit brows, in every direction, upon those who hemmed him in. He urged his way steadily and perseveringly. I was surprised, however, to find, upon his having made the circuit of the square, that he turned and retraced his steps. Still more was I astonished to see him repeat the same walk several times—once nearly detecting me as he came round with a sudden movement.

In this exercise he spent another hour, at the end of which we met with far less interruption from passengers than at first. The rain fell fast; the air grew cool; and the people were retiring to their homes. With a gesture of impatience the wanderer passed into a by-street comparatively deserted. Down this, some quarter of a mile long, he rushed with an activity I could not have dreamed of seeing in one so aged, and which put me to much trouble in pursuit. A few minutes brought us to a large and busy bazaar, with the localities of which the stranger appeared well acquainted, and where his original demeanor again became apparent as he forced his way to and fro, without aim, among the host of buyers and sellers.

During the hour and a half, or thereabouts which we passed in this place, it required much caution on my part to keep him within reach without attracting his observation. Luckily I wore a pair of caoutchouc over-shoes, and could move about in perfect silence. At no moment did he see that I watched him. He entered shop after shop, priced nothing, spoke no word, and looked at all objects with a wild and vacant stare. I was now utterly amazed at his behavior, and firmly resolved that we should not part until I had satisfied myself in some measure respecting him.

A loud-toned clock struck eleven, and the company were fast deserting the bazaar. A shop-keeper, in putting up a shutter, jostled the old man, and at the instant I saw a strong shudder come over his frame. He hurried into the street, looked anxiously around him for an instant, and then ran with incredible swiftness through many crooked and peopleless lanes, until we emerged once more upon the great

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thoroughfare whence we had started—the street of the D—— Hotel. It no longer wore, however, the same aspect. It was still brilliant with gas; but the rain fell fiercely, and there were few persons to be seen.

The stranger grew pale. He walked moodily some paces up the once populous avenue, then, with a heavy sigh, turned in the direction of the river, and plunging through a great variety of devious ways, came out, at length, in view of one of the principal theatres. It was about being closed, and the audience were thronging from the doors. I saw the old man gasp as if for breath while he threw himself amid the crowd; but I thought that the intense agony of his countenance had, in some measure, abated. His head again fell upon his breast; he appeared as I had seen him at first. I observed that he now took the course in which had gone the greater number of the audience—but, upon the whole, I was at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions.

As he proceeded, the company grew more scattered, and his old uneasiness and vacillation were resumed. For some time he followed closely a party of some ten or twelve roisterers; but from this number one by one dropped off, until three only remained together, in a narrow and gloomy lane little frequented.

The stranger paused, and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought; then, with every mark of agitation, pursued rapidly a route which brought us to the verge of the city, amid regions very different from those we had hitherto traversed. It was the most noisome quarter of London, where everything wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. By the dim light of an accidental lamp, tall, antique, worm-eaten, wooden tenements were seen tottering to their fall, in directions so many and capricious that scarce the semblance of a passage was discernible between them. The paving-stones lay at random, displaced from their beds by the rankly growing grass. Horrible filth festered in the dammed-up gutters. The whole atmosphere teemed with desolation.

Yet, as we proceeded, the sounds of human life revived by sure degrees, and at length large bands of the most abandoned of a London populace were seen reeling to and fro. The spirits of the old man again flickered up, as a lamp which is near its death-hour. Once more he strode onward with elastic tread. Suddenly a corner was turned, a blaze of

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light burst upon our sight, and we stood before one of the huge suburban temples of Intemperance—one of the places of the fiend, Gin.

It was now nearly daybreak; but a number of wretched inebriates still pressed in and out of the flaunting entrance. With a half shriek of joy the old man forced a passage within, resumed at once his original bearing, and stalked backward and forward, without apparent object, among the throng. He had not been thus long occupied, however, before a rush to the doors gave token that the host was closing them for the night.

It was something even more intense than despair that I then observed upon the countenance of the singular being whom I had watched so pertinaciously. Yet he did not hesitate in his career, but, with a mad energy, retraced his steps at once, to the heart of the mighty London. Long and swiftly he fled, while I followed him in the wildest amazement, resolute not to abandon a scrutiny in which I now felt an interest all-absorbing.

The sun arose while we proceeded, and, when we had once again reached that most thronged mart of the populous town, the street of the D—— Hotel, it presented an appearance of human bustle and activity scarcely inferior to what I had seen on the evening before. And here, long, amid the momently increasing confusion, did I persist in my pursuit of the stranger. But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation.

"This old man," I said at length, "is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the *Hortulus Animæ*, and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that *es lässt sich nicht lesen.*"

"Q"

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

"The Man of the Crowd" was first published in December 1840—simultaneously in Burton's *The Gentleman's Magazine* and in *The Casket,* the contents of which were identical because the two magazines were about to be combined into Graham's *Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine.* But mark the date—December 1840—*preceding* the first appearance in print of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in the April 1841 issue of *Graham's Magazine.*

In other words, "The Man of the Crowd" *antedated* the world's first detective story!

Was it a trial balloon? An experiment by Poe on the eve of his inventing the detective story? Does "The Man of the Crowd" foreshadow the first detective story?

Let us examine the internal evidence.

Surely the anonymous narrator begins as an armchair detective. He is interested in mystery and crime. He is an acute and accurate observer. He analyzes and deduces. Note the "ear" deduction identifying upper clerks: "They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end." Note the "thumb" deduction identifying gamblers: "I could always detect [significant word!] them . . . a more than ordinary extension of the thumb in a direction at right angles with the fingers"—the sign of a "sharper." Surely here is a detective (Poe almost uses the word) at work! Surely here are deductions of exactly the sort that Sherlock Holmes was to toss off so startlingly nearly half a century later!

But that is not all. The armchair detective changes to an *active* detective—when "the game is afoot." He follows his man; he tracks, trails (wearing "caoutchouc over-shoes"—Poe's phrase for gumshoes), pursuing a tantalizing and baffling mystery; and as surely as the anonymous narrator is a detective, the man pursued is a criminal. And what of the detective's attitude, his point of view, during the chase? He describes himself as being in a "peculiar mental state" (how detective-like!) and he speaks of "darker and deeper themes for speculation" (how equally detective-like!).

Do you object, perhaps, that the mystery, except for psychological insight (how modern!), remains impenetrable, unsolved? But does this make the detective less of a detective? There is no principle in the genre, even in the fully de-

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veloped technique of today, that *insists* the detective must always succeed . . . Yes, in "The Man of the Crowd" the detective fails—but that was not only a new variation in 1840, it would be a comparatively new one by current standards. The mystery genre is still the most moral of all literary forms, since justice—legal as well as poetic—nearly always triumphs.

Here, then, in our opinion, is Poe's embryonic detective—the seed of C. Auguste Dupin, the world's first detective; here is the prototype—Poe's own prototype—of the private eye . . .

There are, of course, other interpretations of "The Man of the Crowd." On a different level, one could theorize that the pursuer was pursuing *himself.* This would be a typically Poesque conception—an imaginative extension and variation of "William Wilson," and another of Poe's anticipations of the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" theme. The pursuer and the pursued are two halves of the same person, one half representing "good," the other half "evil."

If it were not for the disturbing fact (disturbing in a story by Poe) that the action is continuous and lasts longer than a full night—that is, occurs also in the daytime—the pursuer and the pursued could also be interpreted as the worldly mortal-self pursuing the unworldly dream-self (or vice versa!), with one self never catching the other. Or—and this too is typically Poesque—the entire story could be interpreted as a dream, or nightmare, an unsuccessful attempt (as unsuccessful as Poe's own attempts) of a human being to free himself from the chains of earthly living, to reach that "wild weird clime that lieth, sublime, / Out of SPACE—out of TIME."

But these additional speculations are meant only to stimulate your imagination. Our main interest in "The Man of the Crowd" concerns its detective meanings, its historical and originative significance in the mystery genre . . .

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Once more a mixed bag, four new items in wide assortment. You will find one novel of lethal intrigue among the military, one historical imbroglio in which an English sleuth of almost a century ago is matched against Irish terrorists, one mystery-thriller to stir your wits, and, finally, a collection of four shorter pieces whose inclusion here must be explained.

In *The Algonquin Project,* by Frederick Nolan (Morrow, $5.95), a plot to assassinate controversial American General Campion at the end of Hitler's War is planned by no foreign agent, but by the general's own compatriots in his own army. From all sides we watch the assassin's trail as American, British, even Russian intelligence services unite to frustrate him.

What eventually happens, whether their best efforts can head off the professional killer called Shelley, is spun out in scenes of breathless interest from Berlin to Zurich.

Though real-life persons appear in this narrative, its main characters are fictitious. And the author is not as frank as he seems. Even when we think we know everything, Mr. Nolan reserves one final surprise to twist the knife and point no moral for the conclusion of as exciting an adventure as we shall read this year.

Peter Lovesey's *The Tick of Death* (Dodd, Mead, $5.95) presents doughty Sergeant Cribb, of the original Scotland Yard, in Victorian mystery melodrama, 1884. Irish fanatics, agitating for Home Rule with dynamite blasts, have wrought minor chaos.

Sergeant Cribb can feel grateful for police instruction about bombs. Abducted by one group of Dynamiters whose moving spirit is red-haired Rossanna McGee, militant child of militancy, Cribb must himself pose as a terrorist and convince this United Brotherhood of his destructive skill.

When he has succeeded, concealing a trick or two up his sleeve, they choose him for their most ambitious project: to blow up a certain royal personage aboard the yacht *Hildegarde* at

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Gravesend Pier. Cribb's technique in foiling the plot while nailing the culprits marks another victory for Sergeant Cribb and another triumph for Mr. Lovesey.

The power of *The Power Killers,* by Judson Philips (Dodd, Mead, $5.95) may be financial, social, political, always some form of blackmail. Conscienceless tycoons use it to manipulate the earth, falling back on violence only when subtler pressures fail.

Young Rod Chandler, son of the tycoons' lawyer, tries to expose their plot for the oil of a South American country. No sooner has he enlisted *Newsview*'s crusading Peter Styles than Rod's girl is shot to death and he himself kidnaped.

This less than subtle warning seems to have been duplicated. The leader of the South American oil country also disappears, abducted as Rod Chandler was, with a high price for his return. To unravel the tangle and prevent more tragedy, engaging Peter Styles takes up a trail of death or abduction at every turn.

With his own wife vanished and his own life in jeopardy, Peter seems to face impossible odds. But it's nothing new. He keeps his wits about him as surprises explode on every side in this box of tricks, carefully prepared by an old pro for what might be called wholesome shock effect. And he emerges triumphant. We understand everything before that last burst of gunplay fittingly brings down the curtain on a stormier escapade than most of us stay-at-homes can know.

Since the last item for consideration is *The Methods of Uncle Abner,* edited by Tom and Enid Schantz (Aspen Press, $6.95), you may ask why I include it at all. Here are four adventures of Uncle Abner, that stern biblical figure whom Melville Davisson Post imagined as reading riddles and righting wrongs in Virginia's hill country before it became West Virginia in 1863. Three short tales and a novelette, hitherto published only in magazines, they have been gathered into a book for the first time.

Why review it? If you tell me my job is to select books for the general reader I must reply that no follower of this magazine can possibly be described as a general reader.

He is a specialist, a connoisseur who already honors the genius of the late M. D. Post. If I ignored four "unknown" Abner stories, even though these may not be the author's best work, the connoisseur in question would poison me with curare and dance on my grave.

By commending the book, observe, I avoid that fate.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 416th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a prizefighting story, with a knockout punch . . .

The author, Stanley F. Withe, was born in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1920 and raised in New England; for the past ten years he and his wife have lived in San Francisco. His work background should provide him with many plot ideas: claims adjuster, insurance salesman, radio-time salesman, Fuller Brush man, boiler-room salesman, cab driver, owner of a small advertising agency, automobile salesman, and chain-store manager. He is a boxing and football fan, an antique-car buff, and likes good restaurants and travel . . .

THE DIAMOND KILLER

by STANLEY F. WITHE

For four rounds I've been working on this bum in the bread basket. That's where you do the damage. You keep pounding that easy living that shows up around the belly and the ribs. I am slowing this character down enough so now I can start in with combinations to the head. This is what the crowd pays to see.

I'll let this clown stay around for a little while before I put him to sleep so the paying customers won't feel cheated.

By the tenth round he's cut over both eyes and his nose looks like something on one of those W. C. Fields posters they sell to hippie kids. His mouth is all over his face and he looks bad enough to frighten Vincent Price.

I give him a good solid one to the chin and put him away for the ten count.

Now we can all go home.

This is my seventh straight knockout. I've been pushing leather in the heavyweight division for the past six years. Only in the last two years have I started to move up where the real money is. If I get a few de-

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cent breaks, who knows, maybe I can go all the way.

When I get back to my dressing room there is Solly, my manager, big as life talking to the reporters. One thing I'll say for him—he fights a great fight with his yap. With his plastered-down hair and pencil mustache he looks like an aging gigolo gone to fat. His greedy, sharp little pig eyes never miss a thing.

I've got a lot of reasons to hate this guy. The most important reason is that he owns my contract and he's got it cut up into more pieces than a pie on a lunchroom counter.

He hikes all the costs —training expenses, publicity, travel, and of course there's his ten percent off the top. Well, Solly says a hungry fighter makes a good fighter. He doesn't only shaft me, he makes it sound like he's doing me a favor. This guy could teach the politicians some tricks.

Also he is married to Joan. She's been his wife for the past year and a half. She is a beautiful redhead with big green eyes. A real lady. In this racket mostly what you meet are tramps. It didn't take her long to discover what a greasy pig Solly is.

For the past six months she has been in love with me.

It's not fair this man should stand between us. If she divorced him she would be broke. I'm always kept on the verge of being broke, just getting enough to live on. But if Solly dies she winds up a rich widow and I get control of my contract. It doesn't take any egghead from a think tank to realize that Solly has got to go.

One of the reporters asked me if Russo had given me any trouble tonight.

"No," I replied. "Russo is a game boy, but I felt I was always in control of the fight."

"Who do you fight next?" another reporter asked.

"I hope it's Kelly. I'd like to fight him here in San Francisco, but I'd be willing to fight him anyplace."

The reporters like me. Being a hometown boy doesn't hurt. I've managed to keep my private life private. I've avoided washing any dirty linen in public. But most important I'm a crowd pleaser. I'm not afraid to mix it. In an era when most fighters are bicycle riders this counts for a lot.

When the reporters left I went in and showered. I told Solly to go home, that I'd get myself home.

On my way to my apartment I bought a late *Examiner*. The big black headlines told me the Diamond Killer had still not been caught. He'd shot and killed

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twelve people over the past year, usually between nine and ten in the evening. He killed them from a moving automobile and left on the scene of each killing a cheap playing card, the Ace of Diamonds. The victims were from all social levels and from different sections of the city. No one could accuse the unknown killer of discrimination.

The city was in a panic. Every available police car was on patrol.

It made me stop and think.

Here I was worried about killing one man, Solly, and getting away with it, and here were twelve people dead and the police baffled.

Of course I recognized the difference.

The police could not find any single motive linking the twelve dead people to the killer. The mayor had said on television that this was the most difficult crime to solve, a "nut killing." There's no way to anticipate who the next victim will be or where he'll be killed. Unless the police get a tip or are just plain lucky.

I went to a chrome and leather joint near my apartment and took a back booth where I could drink a cup of coffee and think this through.

I knew, in the ordinary course of events, that if I killed Solly the first thing the police would think of would be an unhappy wife or a possible lover of the wife. Also, the way I felt about my contract was no secret.

I had thought of killing Solly and making it look like an accident, but I didn't like that idea. It was too cute. From what I had read it was when you fooled around with trick alibis and fancy footwork you were most apt to trip yourself up.

The idea was to keep things simple.

Now I was beginning to see how things could be worked out.

The next afternoon when I knew Solly would be at the racetrack I telephoned Joan. I arranged to meet her at the north parking lot at the beach. She knew my car.

She was glad to see me. It hurt to see how tired and drawn she looked. Living with Solly couldn't be easy.

One thing we had going for us—we had always been able to share. So I didn't waste any time.

"Joan, I think I've found a solution to our problem."

"You have?"

"Yes. Have you read about the Diamond Killer?"

"Of course. Who hasn't? It's all anyone talks about."

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"Well, honey, this guy was made for us. You're sharp. I think you know what I am going to say next. Solly is going to be his next victim. When they find Solly's body with the playing card beside it, the Diamond Killer is going to get the credit. It will look like just another nut killing."

I could almost feel her thinking. She has nerve. I didn't have to worry about her getting all shook up.

All she said was, "When do we do this?"

"Well, you once told me that Solly usually takes an hour's walk after dinner between nine and ten. Does he still do this?" I couldn't imagine him changing his habit just because of an unknown killer. Solly has too much ego.

"Yes," she replied, "three or four evenings a week he takes a walk. I once asked him if he wasn't afraid of the Diamond Killer and he just laughed."

"We'll make a believer out of him yet. The next time he takes a walk you call me as soon as he leaves the house. My apartment is only ten minutes' driving time from your house."

"You'll be careful?" For the first time she sounded worried.

It was a good feeling to know she cared. Not many people have ever cared what happened to me.

"No problem. Like the kids say, I'll just do my thing."

I tried to keep it light. I didn't want to worry her any more than necessary. "Just to be safe," I added, as if it was an afterthought, "it's best if we stay away from each other for a few weeks. Just insurance."

"I'll miss you," she said.

"I know. I'll miss you too."

It was lonely as soon as she left to go home.

When I got back to the apartment I made my preparations, which were simple. My old .38 army issue was loaded and ready. My car was like a pea in a pod, a three-year-old gray coupe, one of thousands. I used dirt to blur the numbers on the license plates. The last thing I did was to buy a cheap deck of cards and take out the Ace of Diamonds.

I waited for the phone to ring.

I thought back to when I had first started fighting six years ago, not much more than a green kid. Gene Tunney had been my hero. He was one of the few that didn't win the championship and end up a loser.

It was a shame when you thought of the fighters who ended up with the telltale ears and begging money for a bottle of wine and a skidrow flop.

When I first started I was

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one of the stupid ones. I took five to land one. Then I met Lenny who used to hang around the gym doing odd jobs for handouts. Lenny was a thirty-five-year-old ex-heavyweight when I knew him. It almost used to make me cry to see Lenny sitting in a chair, his lips moving, even when he wasn't talking. He was just a few steps away from the funny farm. Solly called him a dirty bum. When he was his manager he called him Tiger.

Then I lost two years when I did my bit in Vietnam. Imagine going all the way to Asia to kill people when they have people like Solly right at home. It makes you stop and think.

I never told Joan because I never wanted her to know that I was worried, but I don't think I have too many fights left in me. I feel I am slowing down. I can't take the next ten years building up a nest egg.

I need Joan, but then I need a lot of things I never had.

The phone rang.

It was Joan telling me Solly had just left the house for his evening walk.

I took the gun, got in the car, and headed for Solly's house. I kept within the speed limit and obeyed all traffic laws. I looked at my watch. It was 9:10. There were very few people on the streets. The Diamond Killer was keeping people at home.

I drove around several blocks close to Solly's house before I saw him walking towards Geary Boulevard on 6th Avenue. This was good. I could approach from the rear, shoot him, then continue to Geary Boulevard, which was a main artery leading to the center of the city. There would be plenty of traffic on Geary so that I could easily lose myself.

Ten minutes from now and I would be home.

I dimmed the lights and opened the right front window. I had the gun on the seat beside me. Solly was on my right now, only about five feet ahead of me. With my right hand I raised the gun slowly.

Suddenly three police cars, approaching from different directions, converged on the intersection in front of me. Three more cars were coming from my rear.

I had been betrayed or was just unlucky. I would never know. Lights shone brightly from the spots on all the police cars. It was like a glaring white daylight.

It was all a sad sick joke.

Solly's death was the only one that was important to me. The others didn't count. They were just something I couldn't help. They had made it so easy in Vietnam.

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

When you are scriptwriters for a TV sit-com series and you're bogged down on page 10 of episode number 52 and the deadline was yesterday, you might feel pretty desperate. Desperate enough to do something really wild. Well, that's how writer Joe Huck and idea-man Stan Percival felt when Stan dreamed up that impossible dream. Imagine one of the oldest con games in the history of bunco, but all dressed up in ultra-mod clothes—and don't forget what P. T. Barnum said . . .

THE BIG BUNCO

by WILLIAM BANKIER

I have a crazy partner. Which is not so bad most of the time because our job is writing scripts for a television situation-comedy series called "Rooms Without Doors" and when you're sweating to come up with a funny premise for episode number 46 and the deadline is yesterday afternoon, a little crazy can be a good thing.

"Stan, we are dead," I will say from my place at the typewriter, little strands of spiderweb stretching from my cramped fingers to the dusty keys. "That rumbling sound you hear above us is clods of earth hitting the lid of our coffin."

And then Stan Percival will heave up his 260 pounds from the folding canvas deck chair, which is the only other piece of furniture in our cubbyhole office, and he will say, "No, Joe. No. We are not dead. We are on the verge of a great idea. All I have to do is say it."

He is looming over me, six feet four inches, his hands working the air like clay, and I know he doesn't have an idea, not in his conscious mind anyway. But there is a look on his face like a man who has a chicken bone in his throat and is

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trying to work it back up and spit it out. Stan's eyes are bulging, his lips are pursing, and there are beads of sweat on his big round face.

"And this is the idea," he says. "Cousin Mary is locked in a church overnight." It is insane; there is no reason for a church to be mentioned, but I keep listening. "She doesn't know how to get out but she has a bottle of brandy with her because she'd been to the liquor store to get supplies for their anniversary party. Back home Uncle Walt misinterprets a phone call because he's lost his hearing aid, so he thinks she's been kidnaped. The police are called in which gets Larry uptight because he's expecting a delivery of forged lottery tickets. And at the end Mary will be up in the bell tower playing 'I'll Be with You in Apple Blossom Time' with her feet, which tips Larry off because this is *their song*."

The whole thing is sheer madness, but I start laughing and I start typing and pretty soon we have a script. Which is why I say a little crazy can be a good thing. Sometimes but not always. Because the time Stan got it into his head that we should sell somebody the Jacques Cartier Bridge was something else. And that is the time I propose to tell you about.

It all began one morning in August when Stan arrived late. We had quit work at nine o'clock the night before, solidly blocked and frustrated at page ten of a difficult, no an impossible script. I had always feared this day.

When Stan came into the office he didn't go to his deck chair. Instead he went to the window which was open a few inches and flung it up all the way so that the glass rattled. Then he thrust the top of his body through the aperture and screamed across Ste. Catherine Street, "Freedom now!"

There must have been some response from the street because he hung out there for a few minutes and I heard one end of an abusive conversation before he drew himself back in and said to me, "Bore, bore, bore! I can't do this any more, Joe Huck. I am dying of boredom." Then he prostrated himself, not in the chair but on the floor.

"Ready when you are, Stanley," I said.

But he went on, "I couldn't sleep last night. I lay awake asking myself where's the excitement? Where's the adventure? Man was not created to lurch round and round on a treadmill. You know who has it all figured out? That former playwright what's-his-name,

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who wrote *African Genitals*. Robert Aardvark."

"Robert Ardrey. *African Genesis*."

"That's the guy. He has a new book in which he theorizes that man's Number One need is not security, it's excitement. Freedom from boredom. I think he's right."

"Okay. How do we work that into episode number 52?"

Stan Percival reared up on one elbow, his large head appearing over the edge of my desk like the Kraken's. "Damn it, that's the point. I am not going to write episode number 52. I am off the treadmill as of now. I seek a new adventure."

"Fine. And what will you do for money?"

Our weekly situation comedy on CBC Television was an imitation of similar American series and we never kidded ourselves. Its existence was predicated on a political demand for Canadian content on the taxpayers' network. But the pay was good and there were no other jobs like it for writers in Montreal.

"Money," said Stan, "will have to be one of the essential ingredients of our new adventure."

"You've got me in it too?"

"Of course. You're just as bored as I am. You're just too security-bound to show it."

It was clear he needed humoring. "Okay, partner, tell me about *our* adventure."

Stan sat up on his blue-denimed haunches. "It has to be some sort of crime."

"Crime?"

"Right. That's where the adventure is. I figured it all out last night. I'm convinced half the people involved in criminal acts do it because the straight-and-narrow bores them stiff."

"But we can't kill anybody. I doubt we could even rob a bank. No experience."

"Pay attention, oh, Lucky Huck. There is crime and there is crime. The category I have in mind is the kind that involves no violence. It demands ingenuity on the part of the criminal, and usually a degree of crookedness in the victim who wants something for nothing. I speak, noble Huck, of the big con, the big bunco."

I shook my head. "These things are not easy."

"Of course not. That's precisely the challenge. But aren't we in the con game already? Don't we spend our days making up preposterous stories that involve the manipulation of a lot of characters to achieve a desired end?" He was on his knees now, sprawled halfway across the desk. "All we have to do is apply our skills to inventing a con. Some sort of plot that

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feeds on human greed and ends up milking some sucker who deserves it because he goes along."

I sensed the momentum in Stan's persuasion, but it was too late to get off the track. "And I suppose you have something in mind."

"It hit me in the wee hours," he said. "We are going to sell the Jacques Cartier Bridge."

I raised my eyes to the window and saw in the distance the massive steel structure vaulting the St. Lawrence River to the South Shore. "Stanley," I said, "this is another fine mess you're getting us into."

"It's an idea. We've had crazier ones. Now all we have to do is work out the details."

I must admit it was an interesting exercise. I went along because there was no way Stan Percival would get back to the script until he had played out his game. By late afternoon we had hacked out a scenario which, given a bit of luck, might just work.

It involved our actor-friend Yves Paquette doing his uncanny impersonation of the Mayor of Montreal and it included an important role for Stan's girl friend, Portia Fleming. If all went well, the plan ended with a payoff to us of $50,000.

When I raised my eyebrows at that, Stan said, "I won't kid you, I need the money. My alimony payments are killing me." He stood up, displaying his denims and faded T-shirt. "You think I enjoy dressing like a middle-aged hippie?"

My $200 sports jacket hung majestically on the back of the chair. "I've tried to tell you—" I began.

"I know. I waste money. But I'm trying to change." He went to the door. "Come on, I'll buy us both dinner."

That evening we prowled hotel lobbies looking for a setting. We were lucky. We had covered the Mount Royal and the Laurentian. Then, in the Queen Elizabeth, we saw listed on the bulletin board: CANADIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CONVENTION.

"These are the guys we want," Stan said.

"But it's today, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. That's too sudden."

"Nonsense. 'Mission Impossible' converts a warehouse into the Freedonian Museum overnight. The faster we have to work, the better. Verve, Brother Huck, panache, élan."

I drifted past a table where ticketed conventioneers were registering and I picked up a membership roster. Then Stan

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and I went into the bar, ordered a beer, and perused the list for a potential bridge buyer. We were halfway through when I spotted a familiar name and a jolt of adrenalin made my hand tremble.

"Lewicki," I said. "E. J. Lewicki from Baytown, Ontario."

Stan's grinning face was clenched like a fist. "It's working, isn't it? The pieces are falling into place."

"Back home in Baytown everybody's heard of E. J. Lewicki. Made his fortune building airfields for the Commonwealth Training Plan during the war. Always in the papers. A hint of scandal one year about kickbacks."

"Our man," Stan said. "Our pigeon."

"Keeps getting hassled by the Provincials for driving fast under the influence. Usually has a pretty chick beside him."

"Oh, my goodness." Stan was cracking his huge knuckles like walnuts. "We couldn't have written a better character ourselves. You say he likes pretty girls? I'll go and get Portia. You pick up Yves Paquette and we'll meet back at the office in half an hour."

We did. Yves and I had possession of the two chairs when Stan arrived with Portia and a paper bag containing six quarts of beer and a roll of paper cups. Drinking beer out of a paper cup is an abomination, but it is just one of the things I hate and yet keep doing when working with Stan Percival. Another is embarking on a venture like selling the Jacques Cartier Bridge to a rich unscrupulous Ontario construction magnate. But I knew there would be no getting my partner back to episode number 52 until he got this quirk out of his system. If it were done, it were best done quickly.

I offered Portia my chair, but she preferred to recline on the desk which caused Stan's huge face to assume a thoughtful expression. I was afraid he might cancel the meeting and order me and Yves out of the office, but the caper held too firm a grip on his mind.

A word about Portia. She is 23 years old and features miles of cascading blonde hair at one end and miles of devastating leg at the other. Her torso is generous too, and stretched out as she was now on one elbow with one knee up, a backless sandal dangling from the other foot and her blouse losing the battle to stay closed three buttons to two, you had to admit nothing more was required of Portia Fleming. Which was just as well because she is a terrible actress.

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"Stanley," she said now, "how is my part coming in the series? Are you writing me more lines?"

This was Stan's current trap. Only by using extreme persuasion had he wangled her a bit part in "Rooms Without Doors." The director, a good judge of talent, abhored any script in which she appeared and was urging Stan to write her out. Meanwhile, from Portia's side the pressure was maintained for a fatter part. And when Portia applied pressure, it was warm and fragrant and sweet. Stan was caught in the vise of life; some day soon he would have to find a way to escape its squeeze.

"This is not a script conference," Stan said. "We are here on a more important matter." And he proceeded to outline our plan. At this point you may be wondering why these two newcomers did not reject the scheme which was, of course, strictly illegal. You must remember Stan was talking to actors. As long as he is playing a part, an actor will do anything from undressing in a department-store window to selling a shoddy product on TV. An actor must act.

"Portia, you will make contact with E. J. Lewicki—Joe will point him out to you. Remember, you are playing the part of a confidential secretary to Mayor Martel of Montreal. All you have to do is drop a hint about the plans to build a new University on Ste. Helen's Island. Just let him know that it will be a big project. A lot of steel will be used."

Yves Paquette said, "I guess you want me to play the part of the Mayor." He put on a tiny twisted smile and let his eyes slip into the famous glazed, maniacal stare and we had to laugh. Even without makeup he was almost His Worship.

"Remember," I said to Yves, "Lewicki will have seen the real Mayor addressing the dinner a few hours earlier, so you'll have to be good."

Yves opened his private door just enough to let me catch a glimpse of the giant ego lurking inside. "'I am good," he said.

We confirmed our times, rehearsed our lines, finished the beer, then went home to bed—I to mine, Yves to his, and Stan, presumably, to Portia's.

Next afternoon I telephoned the hotel and reserved a room in the name of Finn, a clever alias since my name is Huck. I checked in at 5:00, telephoned Stan, and he showed up an hour later carrying the inevitable paper bag. This time it contained a bottle of rye. Stan phoned for ice. Then he called

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Yves and gave him the room number.

At eight o'clock we met Portia in the doorway of the main salon where the Construction Conventioneers had just finished dinner. The real mayor was beginning his speech. Portia had trouble spotting us because we were both wearing glasses we didn't need and Stan had pasted on a false mustache. I tipped the headwaiter and he let us lurk along the wall until I spotted E. J. Lewicki and pointed him out to Portia.

It was years since I had seen the affable millionaire cruising the streets of Baytown, but he had not changed much. His hair was whiter, but it still covered his head like Good King Wenceslas's snow—deep and crisp and even. And the symbolic unlighted cigar still projected from between his teeth untouched by his fastidious lips which were drawn away from the tobacco in a rigid grin.

We left Portia Fleming thus loaded and pointed in the right direction and went back to the room to wait for Yves. Professional to the core, he showed up on the stroke of 9:00, hatted and cloaked to conceal his uncannily Mayorish appearance. At 9:30 we left him and went down to the bar where, according to plan, Portia was supposed to be drinking with Lewicki. And she was, seated at a table in the far corner, their heads so close that she could have bitten the other end of his cigar.

Portia greeted us with surprise as we passed by. "Carl, Peter," she called, using our assumed names, "did you hear the boss's speech?"

"Hello, Jenn. No. We just got here. His Worship wants to see us upstairs to ask how we're making out on the project."

Portia, as Jenny, introduced us in our roles as executive assistants to the Mayor of Montreal. We sat down, accepted a drink, and soon had our plot rolling along in high gear. Lewicki, unscrupulous and avaricious, was everything a con man could ask.

"You guys," he soon said, "must be right in there where the action is."

"Oh, we hear a thing or two."

"The young lady mentioned something about building a new University down on the island. I'd sure like to get in on that."

"Well, sir," Stan said, "there's no reason why you shouldn't. You've certainly made a good friend in Jenny."

"I wonder," I said, "if Mr. Lewicki might not be the man for the Mayor's special project?"

I had let the cat out of the bag and Stan almost overplayed

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his horror. I sensed that we were flirting with a Laurel and Hardy interpretation. But Lewicki seemed interested. Thank goodness for booze and bar lighting.

"Peter, the Mayor's special project is not for public consumption."

"You can talk freely at this table, boys. E. J. Lewicki can keep a secret."

Stan apologized, changed the subject, and for the time it took to finish our drinks and order another round he made empty conversation. But I could tell where Lewicki's thoughts were. Finally he said, "Your Mayor is famous for his big ideas. I guess this new one is a beaut."

My partner appeared to reconsider. He glanced at me. I nodded. "Very well," he said. "Part of our assignment is to find an entrepreneur who is big enough and fast enough to help put this deal over."

Lewicki said, "I just got up and ran twice around the room and you didn't even miss me."

"The deal is this. Now that the subway is running under the River to the South Shore, and the new Champlain Bridge is operating, the Mayor plans to close the old Jacques Cartier Bridge and dismantle it. The city will accept an offer of five million dollars for the steel in the bridge."

"But if I do that, I end up with a lot of steel on my hands and nowhere to go with it."

"That's where the new University fits in. The proposed site is Ste. Helen's Island, right beneath the bridge. You won't have to go anywhere with the steel. You will sell it to the city for use in the new construction. In effect, you will be a broker, buying the bridge and selling it back almost on the same day. At a nice profit. And the company that dismantles the bridge will be working on a very nice municipal contract too."

E. J. Lewicki turned his glittering eyes first on me, then on Stan. The cold cigar pierced our hearts, one after the other. "That's a handsome project. I expect the bidding will be fierce."

"Mayor Martel doesn't work that way," Stan said. "He is, as you may have heard, somewhat of an autocrat. He works fast and he has the power to initiate projects as he sees fit. No, this contract will go to the company the Mayor chooses."

"And you boys are expected to make a recommendation."

"We are."

The elderly millionaire turned to Portia. "What do you say, Jenny?"

She put her hand on his. "I know the Mayor would like you."

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"Done," Lewicki said. "Tell His Worship I'm interested."

"We can do better. We can take you to him right now."

So there we all were twenty minutes later in my room on the fifteenth floor, raising our glasses of rye and tap water while the Mayor of Montreal, played to the hilt by Yves Paquette, proposed a toast.

"*Félicitations á Monsieur Lewicki,*" he said, "and success to all of us. May this project be brought to a very speedy and profitable conclusion."

We drank and Yves drew Stan into a corner for a few words. Then Yves put down his glass, shook hands with everyone, took his coat and hat, and made his departure.

The room seemed empty after Yves's large performance. Stan said to Lewicki, "The Mayor just reminded me of a detail I neglected to mention. There are certain requirements he has to fulfill in order to expedite these projects as quickly as he does. It is normal, in these cases, for the successful contractor to pay a deposit—"

"What you're saying is there's a payoff."

"That's a harsh word. I would never use it to describe—"

He was interrupted again, this time by Lewicki's hearty laughter. "Don't be embarrassed, my boy. I've been in this game a long time. I was wondering when you were going to ask for it. How much do you want?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"Cash, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Used bills, small denominations."

When Lewicki and Portia left ten minutes later, Stan and I fell on the floor. Literally. "He went for it!" Stan said. "We have sold that man the Jacques Cartier Bridge!"

"I can't believe it!"

"Believe it, my son. Tomorrow morning, right after the banks open, Mr. Lewicki will be here with the money."

And it was so. We slept fitfully, woke at eight, shaved and dressed and had a large room-service breakfast. At 10:30 Lewicki and Portia arrived together with a satchel which, when opened, revealed the sum of $50,000 in used, low-denomination banknotes.

"Jenny," Stan said, still playing everything according to our beautiful script, "you'd better deliver this cash to the Mayor's office and tell His Worship that the deal has been consummated."

She took the satchel and left.

"Meanwhile," Stan said, "Peter and I will work fast drawing up the necessary papers to get this project under-

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way. You'll be hearing from us very soon."

Lewicki was standing at the window looking downriver at his newest possession. "Fine," he said. "And now I wonder if you boys have any of that good Canadian whiskey left."

I am not a morning drinker, but for $50,000 I figured I could go along. We sipped and chatted while my impatience grew. The show was over. I wished to be gone.

Finally Lewicki set down his empty glass. Then he patted his pockets. "Oh, boys," he said, "I have just given the young lady all the cash I have. I'm checking out now and I have a lot of people to tip. How much money can you spare me?"

Stan said, "How much do you need?"

Lewicki pondered and mumbled. "Bellboys, maid, garage, waiters—they've all been real good to me. Can you let me have a couple of hundred?"

Stan and I pooled our funds. We just made $200 with cab fare left over. Back in the office, waiting for Portia to show up, I said, "Imagine that old bird hitting us up like that."

Stan said, "Relax, he said he'd mail it back. Besides, we pay out $200, we get back $50,000 less expenses. If you don't speculate, you can't accumulate."

By now we were hungry. By two o'clock we were tired and surly. By 3:30 we were suspicious. At 4:00, when Portia's telegram was delivered, we were angry and sick. I gave my last quarter to the boy while Stan took a long yellow sheet from the envelope. He read it aloud.

HI BOYS. I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD TO SEND A LONG WIRE. NOW I'M RICH SO HERE GOES. STAN, I ALWAYS THOUGHT MY FAILURE IN TV WAS NOT BECAUSE I'M A BAD ACTRESS BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE A BAD WRITER. THIS PROVES IT. THE MOTIVATION YOU PROVIDED ME IN THIS CON GAME WAS VERY FLIMSY. WHY SHOULD I CHEAT THAT SWEET MR. LEWICKI JUST SO YOU AND YOUR DUMB PARTNER CAN MAKE A KILLING? ANYWAY E.J. TELLS ME YOUR PLAN WOULDN'T HAVE FOOLED ANYBODY. THE STEEL FROM A BRIDGE WOULD NEVER BE USED IN CONSTRUCTING UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS. JUST ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF YOUR CARELESS PLOTTING. YOU DO IT ALL THE TIME. GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOUR TACKY TELEVISION PLAYS BUT NOT FOR REAL LIFE. SO I AM HERE NOW IN BAYTOWN WITH SOMEBODY WHO REALLY KNOWS HOW TO BE NICE TO ME. TELL JOE I LIKE HIS HOMETOWN. HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT. LOVE. PORTIA.

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After Stan had torn up the telegram and kicked the deck chair to pieces, nobody said anything for a while. Then I went over and tried to cheer him up.

"Well, at least you're rid of Portia Fleming. She was a problem in the series and now she's gone forever."

I said it, but I took no comfort from it, and I don't think Stan did either. We wanted her gone because she was supposed to be dumb. But the way things worked out, it looks like the smart cookies flew away to Baytown and left the dumb guys in Montreal, out $200 plus expenses.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Ganelon story by

JAMES POWELL

Another of James Powell's sui-generis San Sebastiano stories . . . Some stories are written in a light and easy style; they ripple along at a fast-reading pace. Other stories are tightly packed, with every word necessary; these stories should be read slowly—sipped and savored like old wine.

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THE OUBLIETTE CIPHER

by JAMES POWELL

It is a tenet of memory that outbreaks of war are preceded by golden days and silver nights. And, in fact, San Sebastiano's first week of the summer of 1914 was filled with café music, women's laughter, and the gay sounds of an entire principality taken to the streets.

On the evening of June 27, Ambrose Ganelon Fils, wearing an oversized smile and tipping his hat to promenading friends from the open back of his yellow Plessy-Voltigeur Touring Car, drove in electric silence down the Boulevard Tancredi toward the Porte de l'Est. Tall, elegant in spite of large hands and feet, he maintained his smile until he entered the villa-lined streets of the Faubourg St. Félix. Only there, in the suburban twilight, did the smile vanish, abruptly and without a trace.

A moment later Achmed, his Berber chauffeur announced, "We are being followed, sir." Ganelon nodded approvingly without turning. He knew the cab behind them contained a bald-as-a-skull, monocled Geor-

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gian count and a fat jovial Bavarian with twisted teeth and a penchant for killing people by strangulation. Enemies, they were traveling together to economize on cab fare. Each would pay half. Each would enter the whole on his expense account.

For five days now, ever since he broke the Kirilkin code, Ganelon had been obliged to keep in full view of these men, smiling until his jaw ached at the Beaulieu racetrack, at the Opéra Bouffe, at the Restaurant Becker. Tragic events were afoot in Europe, events that Ganelon and his Intelligence people could not prevent. All they could do was avoid any indication that the Kirilkin masterpiece had become an open book.

For five days the Georgian's pocket telescope had scrutinized Ganelon's face for just such a sign, while the Bavarian, operating on the assumption that Kirilkin had indeed met his match, sought with immense field glasses to discover if the decoded message meant peace or war.

So Ganelon was relieved when the anniversary of Jeudi's Last Charge arrived, a day when everyone knew he dined with Edmund Ravenhurst, the only other survivor of the 1878 cavalry disaster at El Skadiwah. A member of San Sebastiano's Confederate colony, Ravenhurst had married into one of the principality's oldest and most honored families. In spite of an arm lost during the American Civil War he had won a commission in the Tripolitanian Lancers. Ganelon had served under him as a callow subaltern at the time of the Jeudi massacre.

Twenty years ago, not long after he received the cabbage insignia of a brigadier general for his shoulderboards, Ravenhurst had retired from the army in the face of a deep personal tragedy. On the eve of the wedding of his oldest son Vincent, the bride-to-be had run off with Ravenhurst's younger son, Guy. Neither son was ever seen again. On what would have been his wedding day Vincent had drowned himself in the tarn behind Bellegarde, the ancestral home.

Today Ravenhurst lived like a recluse behind those somber walls on the escarpment overlooking the row-house rooftops of the working class suburb of La Truc. Well, Ganelon had had his fill of smiling. For once his mood coincided with the grim stones and the dour master of Bellegarde.

"You have heard that Moretto is dead?" asked

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Ravenhurst in English which had somehow become the language of these annual visits. The dinner table cleared, they had been sitting, staring into the bare hearth. Ganelon's anxious thoughts had been in Berlin where, as bad luck would have it, his beautiful wife Flora and their son were vacationing.

At Ravenhurst's words Ganelon nodded and took a sip from his drink. "The Australian gold fields are no place for a man his age to recoup the family fortune," he said. Separated from his prospecting party, Moretto had become lost in the wilderness of Queensland.

"Moretto's widow received a letter from this Jenkins who ran the trading post where he died," said the General. "She thought some of it might interest me." With a hand that already held a drink and a cigar, he took an envelope from the mantel. "The last paragraph but one is what she meant."

The letter was on ruled yellow paper and the words stood out thick and bright. Ganelon read: "Like I said it was the Wolfman what brought him in, Missus. Wolfman we call him what with his wild black hair and his beard almost up to his eyes and the claws on him like a bird. He's lived somewhere out there in a burrow going on 20 years now without letting any of us get within stone-throwing distance. I found your late departed on the doorstep near gone from exposure and there was the Wolfman hurrying off. From the tracks he must have carried your mister a long way. Just then your mister opened his eyes for the last time and called out in French which I know a bit of from better days in the engine-room of the S.S. Fleur de Lys. 'Come back, Ravenhurst,' he said. 'Ravenhurst, come back.' Ravenhurst, if that was the Wolfman's real name, didn't."

"The ravings of a dying man?" asked the General. "What do you think?"

"Either that," said Ganelon, "or by some wild coincidence Moretto was actually found in the wilderness by your son Guy."

"Who lives there like an animal?" demanded Ravenhurst.

"These things happen, my friend," said Ganelon. "Guilt over a brother's death could be unbalancing. Were they close?"

"The way only opposites can be," nodded the General. "Vincent, the sobersides, reserved and dispassionate, born to the life of the Bourse. Guy, the charmer, the smiling gambler, reckless adventurer incarnate." Ravenhurst gave a faraway

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smile. "You'd swear that as boys they'd divided the whole world between them like two mighty brother-kings setting careful boundaries on everything so they'd never have reason to fight. And Vincent and Guy never did."

"Until Amelie Durochet came along," added Ganelon.

Ravenhurst nodded again. "An extraordinary girl. Perhaps Guy had had others who were prettier, but none with such intelligence or vivacity. But, mind you, she was no flibbertigibbet." When the General had explained "flibbertigibbet" which was beyond Ganelon's English, he continued, "I remember how much I wanted their relationship to last. But then Guy met the prima ballerina, what was her name? Remember? Gambini the smuggler's protégée."

"The one they called La Cigalle?" asked Ganelon.

"That's the one," said Ravenhurst. "'Goodbye, Amelie,' I said to myself. But, lo and behold, after a decent cooling-off period, Amelie appeared here again, this time as Vincent's guest. In fact, she and Vincent began to see a great deal of each other and after a time announced their engagement. Personally, I would have welcomed her into the family on whichever arm she chose.

"Not long after, four of Gambini's associates cornered Guy late one night near the Porte de la Foret and beat him almost to death. He lay unconscious for several days, long enough for his dancer to run off with an officer of dragoons. It was Vincent's suggestion that Amelie nurse Guy back to health. Vincent was obliged to go to Paris on business for several weeks, you see, while I was up to my neck in my campaign against army adaptation of the Vachette Steam Carbine. We were both glad to put Guy in her tender hands.

"By the time Vincent returned, the patient though ambulatory had lost the power to look his brother straight in the eye. And Amelie appeared strangely preoccupied. Though Vincent chose to act as if nothing were amiss, I caught him in unguarded moments contemplating some bleak and terrible interior landscape. I'd never seen my boys want the same thing before. To tell the truth, I didn't know what to expect. I think I was counting on Amelie's good sense to work things out. And in fact it looked to me as if she wanted the wedding to proceed as planned."

"But of course you were wrong," remarked Ganelon.

"Was I?" asked the General grimly. "Finish your drink. I

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want to show you something."

Closed for several generations, Bellegarde's west wing had started to return to nature. To follow the General and the light from his kerosene lamp down the shadowy Gothic halls and through the empty vaulted rooms was like exploring a system of tunnels and caves, an effect heightened by an occasional collapsed wall or buckled section of the stone floor.

"As my dear wife always said, earth tremors come with the mortgage when you build along the St. Félix Fault," said Ravenhurst. "I made my discovery on an inspection tour after last month's tremor."

They had entered a long room with a molded ceiling.

"This was once the refectory," said Ravenhurst, raising his lamp. "More recently, my wife's grandfather used it to hide the immense collection of stuffed toy animals and golliwogs that was his only interest in life. Somewhere in the years between it served a more violent purpose."

He pushed and a hidden door swung open in the wall.

"Careful," he cautioned when Ganelon stepped forward. "It's a thirty-foot drop to solid rock."

He shone the lamp inside. The space was like a bottomless closet.

"Originally this must have been one of the ancient cisterns," said the General. "Later someone turned it into an oubliette. They tell me it was once quite the fashion to drop an enemy you couldn't bring yourself to kill into an oubliette and forget about him. The earth tremor must have sprung the door. Unfortunately I couldn't resist dragging a ladder in here to investigate."

The oubliette was a bottle-shaped dungeon, three feet across at the neck, ten at the bottom, and carved out of solid rock. The skeleton, that forlorn arrangement of bones, sat propped up against the wall. The skull hung down and to the side coyly, as though hiding a grin.

"A simple fracture of the left tibia, probably sustained in the fall," said Ganelon. The stone echoed back his words. He crouched down over the bones and tatters of rotting cloth. "The articulation of the shoulder joint suggests a woman," he said, explaining absently, "from buttoning their dresses up the back and tending hair, et cetera."

"It's Amelie Durochet," insisted the General who had chosen to remain at the foot of the ladder. "That's her reticule. Those are her initials on the button."

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Ganelon unbuttoned the mesh bag that lay by the skeleton's right hand and emptied its contents into his palm: some keys, the brown shredded remains of a lace handkerchief, and a few coins. "Could she have fallen in here accidentally?" he asked.

Ravenhurst shook his head. "Gothic ruins had no attraction for her."

"Did Guy or Vincent know about the oubliette?" asked Ganelon.

"I'm sure they both did," said the General. "As boys they roamed this wing like a pair of wild Indians. You can bet nothing escaped them. Do you realize what all this means? Here's one possibility: Amelie arranged to meet Guy to tell him she was going through with her marriage to Vincent and in a rage Guy threw her down here and fled. Here's another even more terrible one: Vincent surprised them in the act of running away, killed Guy in a rage, and threw Amelie down here. The drowned body pulled from the tarn could have been Guy's. It had been in the water over a month."

The General cursed in exasperation. "I squint my mind's eye against the Australian sun and try to make out that Wolfman's face. And sometimes it's Guy and sometimes it's Vincent. What I can't understand is why she didn't scratch 'Guy killed me' or 'Vincent left me here to die' in letters the whole world could read. Why didn't she leave us a message?"

Ganelon was on his knees examining the floor near the reticule. He set down the lamp and pointed at two coins in the dust. "Perhaps she did just that," he said.

The moon stood high and clear, topping the black shapes of the garden with silver —including somewhere, Ganelon had no doubt, the Georgian count's bald pate and the Bavarian's bowler. Ganelon stood at the window of the darkened room.

"An interesting problem for the cryptographer," he said in the earnest tone of someone trying to change the subject. "For example, if we fired a projectile to the moon to make contact with the inhabitants, its message would have to be in a code in reverse, one any Moonman could decipher."

"And that's what these two coins are?" asked the General. "They should tell us the name of her murderer?"

"The principle would be the same," said Ganelon quietly.

Pondering, Ravenhurst lit a fresh cigar. "Two coins. A one-franc piece. A twenty-centime

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piece. Gold and silver." He threw the match into the cold fireplace. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "One evening when Amelie was at the piano Vincent asked her to play Strauss's *Gold and Silver Waltz*."

"Was that one of his favorites?" asked Ganelon without turning from the window.

The General shook his head. "No, he preferred Meyerbeer."

"Actually I think she positioned the coins to be read the other way," said Ganelon.

The General shrugged impatiently. "Silver and gold, then. Twenty and one. Twenty-one. Guy was quite a card player." Then he shook his head. "No, stud poker was his game." Ravenhurst swore. "But damn it, as I said, why did she have to use a code at all?"

"Because when she was dead her murderer might return," explained Ganelon patiently. "He'd be sure to remove any obvious message. The coins were a gamble. She hoped they would look as if they had merely spilled from her reticule."

"And how do you know they didn't?" asked Ravenhurst.

"She buttoned the reticule to show us that wasn't the case," said Ganelon. "At first glance, two coins. At second glance, a code." He gave the General a thoughtful look. Then quickly, as though afraid he might change his mind, Ganelon said, "When I was a boy there was a little cellar café just off the rue Blondin. It had no sign or awning, just this written over the door."

On a piece of paper Ganelon wrote: 0 20 (100-100) 0.

Ravenhurst studied the paper, frowned, moved his lips uncertainly, then smiled. "Ah, that double-hundred and the fact that it would be in French threw me for a moment. Oh vingt cents oh. *Au vin sans eau.* 'Where unwatered wine is served.' Very good. You've made your point. The sign grabs your attention by momentarily mystifying you. It's a code that's intended to be understood. But how does that help us here?"

Ganelon gave a little shrug. "My friend, you forget that one franc is also one hundred centimes. So the coins should read: 20-100."

The General covered his eyes with his hand. "Vingt-cent Vincent," he said with a weary ache in his voice. "So it was Vincent who murdered his brother and left Amelie to die at the bottom of an oubliette." He shuddered. "A man should at least have the courage to kill his victim himself."

"Generals are hardly famous for that. Or Intelligence chiefs

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for that matter," observed Ganelon. "But Vincent is also the Wolfman, don't forget."

"Yes," said Ravenhurst huskily, "living in a hole in the ground and baying at the moon like a wild beast."

"I mean he tried to save Moretto's life," said Ganelon. "The others are dead, my friend. They can't use your affection."

The General threw his cigar in the fireplace and watched its glow fade like a drowsing eye. Leaving the General to ponder bygone murders, Ganelon turned his own thoughts back to his wife and son. Once Europe's most accomplished jewel thief, his wife Flora, for her own amusement, would now and then plan some daring robbery, made all the more challenging by self-imposed handicaps. It was the Prussian Blue in the diamond collection of the Monbijou palace and how to steal it while confined to a wicker bath chair that had attracted her to Berlin. A wire urging her home would show he knew that war was near.

War. Ganelon thought of El Skadiwah and General Jeudi with a mad grin on his face as he rallied the broken line of horsemen for the final time with "Onward and upward, my lads!" This time, would the slogans be less commonplace?

When the clock struck four Ganelon roused himself. The moon had set. Ravenhurst shifted his weight in the darkness. Ganelon was about to take his leave when it occurred to him that by dozing in his chair until six he might earn the dubious distinction of firing the first shot in the coming war. He dozed.

When he awoke the sun was rising. The General heard him calling down for his car and started up, quite wide-awake. "I've neglected you shamefully," he apologized. "I'll see you to the door."

Ganelon shook his head. "I'll let myself out by the garden," he said, crossing to the French doors. He stopped and turned back into the room. "Go to Australia, my friend. Find Vincent and bring him back. Pretty soon one more killer or madman in Europe won't make much of a difference."

The General avoided his eyes. "Now now," he said. But as Ganelon closed the doors behind him, he heard the old man add a quiet, "Perhaps later."

There in the garden beneath a pollarded beech Ganelon found the body of the Georgian count, his head oddly angled and turned shyly away. His monocle, like a gold coin on the grass, reflected the dawn. If the count had remembered that

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after six the electric trams ran regularly from La Truc to San Sebastiano and that there was no need to share a cab with his enemy, he probably would have killed the fat man with the icepick-like device in his cane. But it was the Bavarian who remembered the tram. And Ganelon.

Achmed in mouse-gray livery and orange puttees was waiting at the open door of the car with coffee and croissants on a tray. Ganelon stepped inside. Moments later the car was rolling out the gate of Bellegarde. Before Ganelon had finished his first croissant they had come upon the Bavarian with his bear-like peasant stride and fat nape heading for the tramcar terminus at La Truc. Just in time as they passed, Ganelon remembered the Kirilkin code and forced his face into the smile of a man looking forward to a wonderful day.

"Q"

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a *NEW* crime story by

RUTH RENDELL

While attending a seven-days' sales conference in Paris, Sandy Vaughan had an adventure. Really, it was a series of adventures, some romantic and most enjoyable, and some menacing and perilous. And at the end Sandy confronted Monsieur Thousand Apologies in a pitch-dark labyrinth—that "dim figure, heavily raincoated," that snaky elusive shadow . . .

A SPOT OF FOLLY

by RUTH RENDELL

The other delegates to the sales conference were spending the evening at the Folies Bergères and going on afterward to some night club. Unless he could scrape up an acquaintance in the bar, which the language barrier made unlikely, there would be no one to whom he could relate his experience of the past few hours. As he drove the Renault into the underground car park, Sandy Vaughan considered this with a shade of bitterness that threatened to eclipse his triumphant mood. To tell his sort of story when it is fresh in the mind—and the body—is everything. Much is lost by waiting till next day. A gloom descends on it in inverse ratio to the brightness of the morning light, and that which has evinced one's worldly wisdom and conquering charm at midnight becomes stale, flat, and unprofitable at 7:30 in the morning.

The foyer of the Hotel Toronto, to which Sandy ascended by elevator, was dimly lit. The night porter sat behind the reception desk reading *France Soir* and smoking a small black cigar. Sandy asked for his room key and was going back to the elevator when he noticed there was still a light on in the bar. A little nightcap—a double whiskey, say—would send him to sleep and console him for the lack of companionship. The bar

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seemed to be empty except for the barman, a sullen-looking youth, occupied precisely as was the night porter.

Sandy pushed open the double glass doors. He got halfway to the bar and then saw that the place wasn't, as he'd first believed, deserted. At a table in a far corner, an empty glass and a full ashtray in front of him, sat Denis Crawford looking, Sandy thought, as if he'd lost a thousand francs on a dud lottery ticket. But this did nothing to deter Sandy. He was delighted to find so unexpectedly a friend and a listener. He charged across the room, waving jovially as if he hadn't seen Denis for a year.

"Well, well, well," he chuckled, slapping Denis on the back. "Fancy finding you here!"

"I'm staying here," said Denis.

"I know you are, old man, but I thought you'd gone off with the boys to the Folies."

"I don't much care for that sort of thing." Shoved, dug in the ribs, Denis edged away along the upholstered seat. "Didn't you go?"

Sandy had been hoping for just such an opening. Slightly lowering his voice, leaning closer, he said, "I've been having a little spot of follies on my own account."

Denis said nothing. His look indicated that he thought Sandy had been to a strip show, a misapprehension Sandy intended to dispel. "Wait till you hear, old man," he said. "But a drink first, eh?"

"I don't want another, thanks, Sandy."

"Nonsense, of course you do." He shouted, "*Garçon!*" to the barman whose face became even more sullen at this term of address. "*Deux* whiskey sours," and he held up two fingers in case there should be any doubt.

Denis said, "I don't think he much cares for being called that."

"Then he must lump it, old man. My French may not be up to your standards—I didn't have the advantage of going to school in France—but I flatter myself it's adequate, perfectly adequate."

"I'm sure you manage, Sandy."

Here was another excellent cue. "I do that all right, Den, old boy. My not *parlez*-ing like a bloody French dictionary didn't stand in my way tonight, I can tell you. There is one activity you can get by in with a universal language, and you won't need three guesses to tell me what that is."

The barman slapped down the whiskey sours and while Sandy muttered a curt "*Merci,*"

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Denis let forth a flood of which Sandy caught the gist, that he was apologizing for keeping that sulky boy up so late. The barman's face registered a slightly warmer expression. Sandy shrugged impatiently at the diversion. He took a swig at his drink and tried again.

"By God, I need that after what I've been up to."

"Well, what have you been up to?"

Sandy didn't much care for the way Denis had said that, with a half sigh as if he were bored. Denis Crawford had better remember he was a junior executive of the firm, that he'd been with them only nine months, and that it was only because of his French and Sandy's kind string-pulling that he was here in Paris at all. "I'll tell you, my lad. I've been up to what I get up to whenever I find myself at a loose end in a big city—to wit, passing a highly enjoyable evening in the arms of a very sweet chick."

"You what?" said Denis.

"Come on now, laddie, you heard. I was all set to go along to the Folies with the boys, but I had ten minutes to kill so I popped into this bar in Montmartre for a quick one. The next thing I knew there was this chick giving me the eye. And was she an eyeful herself!" Sandy chuckled reminiscently. "We went back to her place, a lovely little flat right up at the top of Montmartre, and then—well, you can imagine. I don't need to go into details."

But he went into a few just the same. "I'd have stayed all night, as a matter of fact, but she was expecting her boy friend home at half-past eleven. I didn't fancy any rough stuff, and he's of a jealousy *formidable,* she said. But it was a real wrench tearing myself away from a chick like that."

To Sandy's amusement Denis had flushed darkly. He seemed quite upset, almost as if he'd had a shock, and when he reached for a cigarette his hand was unsteady. At last he said in a very low voice, "Do you make a habit of this sort of thing?"

"When I'm out of England, I told you. What's so terrible about that? A man needs a bit of comfort after a hard day's work."

"I never knew. I hadn't the faintest idea." Really, you'd have thought Sandy had confessed to some crime, some nasty perversion. Sandy started to laugh at the man's naivete, but Denis' next question made him almost cross. "What does Diana say about these—these goings-on?"

"You don't suppose I let my wife into secrets of that sort?"

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"But she loves you, she's devoted to you."

"So she should be," said Sandy, peeved by this censorious inquisition. "I've given her two smashing little kids, haven't I? And a damn sight better house than her father ever had, and a car of her own and whatever she likes to spend on clothes. What more does she expect?"

Denis Crawford hadn't yet touched his drink. He raised his right arm now in a funny gesture as if to ward off a blow and in letting it fall across the table as he uttered the single word, "Fidelity," he swept his glass and its contents to the floor. There was a tinkling crash and a little pool of liquid on the carpet. It was, of course, pure accident, as Sandy, not sorry for this interruption, hastened to say.

The barman put down his paper, got off his stool, and came over to pick up the broken glass. He regarded the carpet in gloomy doubt, thought better of any notion of swabbing up the liquid, and instead smudged it further in with his toe.

"*Encore, un* whiskey sour," said Sandy.

"Not for me. I'm going to bed."

Sandy watched him go. He didn't cancel the order but drank it himself. Well, he'd know better than to confide in Denis Crawford again, the miserable milksop. Sandy liked this alliterative combination so much that he repeated it several times under his breath —miserable milksop, miserable mealy-mouthed milksop.

Of course all that sort of moralistic disapproval could be put down to envy. Denis might be tall and dark and good-looking and only 28, but he hadn't the faintest idea how to go about life. And Sandy remembered how dim he'd been when he'd first come to London and had stayed with him and Diana before he'd found a place of his own. Even then he'd refused all Sandy's friendly overtures and offers to show him the town, preferring to go to those way-out cinemas or stay in with Diana and the kids. Poor old Diana, she must have got pretty fed up with him following her about like a little dog.

Yes, Denis Crawford was a poor thing. Couldn't drink, never had a woman; didn't know he was born. Might even be queer. This thought cheered Sandy so much that he condescended to say a jolly *"Bon soir"* to the barman before going upstairs and falling into a heavy sleep.

On the following day they got

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up from the conference table at lunchtime, and Sandy, not at all anxious to join the others in an organized trip up the Eiffel Tower, made for the telephone. First he called his wife. He knew his duty. It was one thing to have a bit of fun when one was off the leash, quite another to neglect one's wife. Sandy had nothing but contempt for men who neglected their wives. Poor old Diana worried herself sick about him if he didn't call regularly.

"Hello, darling," he said in hearty cheerful tones when she answered. "How's tricks?"

Funny creatures, women, you never quite knew how they'd react. She'd moaned like hell when he'd told her the conference was going to last a whole week this year, yet now her "Oh, it's you" sounded disappointed. For some reason. But it was no good letting them rile you and useless to probe into the causes of their funny little moods.

Instead he chatted breezily about Paris, giving her the impression he'd been out to Versailles and into some of those art galleries. When she'd told him the kids were all right and she was all right and he'd promised to bring her back some Rochas perfume, he hung up, his duty done. Now for pleasure.

Marie Laure's phone number was jotted down in the back of his address book, disguised under the clever code he always used. You took the two pairs of digits and subtracted ten from each pair. Simple, my dear Watson. I am Hawkshaw, the detective, and no one can pull a fast one on me. Sandy added the tens and dialed the decoded number.

She was in. *Evidemment,* she would love to see Song-dee that night. Would seven o'clock suit him? He understood, *n'est ce pas,* that the boy friend would be home by ten, so he must be gone early, but if three hours of her company would suit him . . .?

Immensely pleased with himself, Sandy went up to the reception desk, asked to have his car washed, and cashed some traveler's checks. In cataloguing Marie Laure's charms to Denis Crawford, he had omitted to mention that they were expensive. He went into the Avenue Kleber and bought a bottle of champagne. Then he had a bath and a little nap.

Sandy never went anywhere without having a quick one first. In the bar he encountered Denis Crawford drinking lager with Malcolm Shaw, the firm's marketing manager. Denis gave him such a cold truculent

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look that Sandy couldn't resist the temptation to tell them where he was going.

"That's my boy," said Malcolm. "You only live once."

"If you call that living," said Denis.

The other man winked at Sandy behind Denis' back. "I'd have done the same myself, Sandy, a year ago. Still, I have my compensations." He looked at his watch. "Which reminds me it's time I gave her a call."

Sandy watched him leave and hurry to the telephone.

"You see," he said. "I'm not the only one."

"He's not married," said Denis Crawford.

"Oh, you're too pure to live! No wonder the good people of Paris called a suburb after you. Saint Denis." He laughed heartily at his joke. "Personally, I prefer Montmartre and the Rue Ninon de l'Enclos." And he got off his stool. "See you."

The Rue Ninon de l'Enclos was packed with cars, but Sandy managed to find a parking space. Marie Laure was waiting for him, his money, and his champagne, and gave him the sort of evening that always put him in high spirits. It was 9:55 when he came out into the street again and went back to his car.

A couple of yards from it he stopped short. There was a long jagged scrape on one of the Renault's fenders. He let out a gasp of anger and plunged forward, narrowly missing falling under the wheels of a taxi. The driver swore at him and Sandy swore back, shaking his fist. At close quarters the scrape was even worse than it had at first appeared. No doubt about it, that couldn't be merely sprayed. He'd have to have a new fender.

Sandy cursed richly. The French were wild drivers. Some madman, of that taxi-driver's type, had torn down the Rue Ninon de l'Enclos while Sandy was with Marie Laure and passed just too close to the Renault.

It wasn't until he was in the car, in the driver's seat, that he saw the note, a small scrap of paper held against the windshield by one of the wipers. Sandy put his hand out the window and took it, tearing it slightly as he pulled it from under the wiper. It read: *Thousand apologies. I will pay the damages. Meet me tomorrow 1900 hours Le Garage Rivery, Rue des Chattes, XV111me Arrondissement.*

There was no signature, no phone number. Still, it was enough. It slightly consoled him for the scar on the Renault's virgin, jewel-like bodywork.

He found Malcolm Shaw sit-

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ting in the hotel lounge when he got back, and he showed him the note. "Come and see what Monsieur Thousand Apologies has done," he said, and together they went down to the car park. Denis Crawford would have to choose that moment to come into the car park and get something out of his own Mini. Sandy ignored him, even when he came up to them.

Malcolm made sympathetic noises. He agreed that the scrape was an eyesore, and together they prodded at the flaking paint. Denis wondered if the blow to the fender had upset the alignment, and although Sandy scoffed at this, he let Denis get into the car and shift about at the steering wheel, squinting absurdly through the windshield. Anything to keep him quiet. Malcolm made a few helpful suggestions and assessed the damage at about £50.

"You should get that out of him, Sandy," he said. "You always were lucky."

"Better be born lucky than rich, eh?"

"You're lucky *and* rich."

It was just like Denis Crawford to get out of the car at this point and interrupt their merriment with a grave, "Has it occurred to you that this could be a trap?"

"A what?"

"A way of getting you on your own and beating you up. Maybe rob you as well."

"And just why should Monsieur Thousand Apologies want to beat Sandy up?" asked Malcolm.

"Because the chances are he's the jealous lover of Sandy's lady friend."

"Oh, you're crazy," said Sandy. "You go to the cinema too much."

"Just think about it, Sandy. Why didn't he leave a name or a phone number on that note if he's honest? And why write in English? Yours is a French car."

"He saw the G.B. plate, of course," said Malcolm.

Denis shrugged. He scrutinized the fender. "That wasn't made by another vehicle. It looks to me as if it was done with a hammer."

"For God's sake!" Sandy exploded. "How would *you* know? Since when have you been an insurance assessor? You've got an overdeveloped imagination, laddie."

"All right. But I've warned you. You'd just better be careful."

What a feeble character the man was! Neurotic, really. Sandy, who prided himself on his guts, felt rather stimulated than otherwise by Denis' forebodings. Not that he be-

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lieved in them. But if there were something fishy about Monsieur Thousand Apologies, what an adventure, what a story to tell the boys! He pictured himself recounting the sort of experience that only a red-blooded man could have.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I had this French girl in Paris and her boy friend came after me?" That was how he'd begin it. Savoring this story in anticipation, Sandy couldn't resist telling a good many of his colleagues about it on the following day. But in forecasting his own tactics he left out the gun.

The gun was a Luger that Sandy's father had taken off a dead German in 1940. His attitude toward it was much the same as other people's attitude toward sleeping pills. Though he had never used it, it was a comfort knowing it was there, and he never traveled without it. Ever since that time when he'd been threatened by a hitchhiker he'd picked up in Turkey, he'd taken the gun with him on his foreign trips, concealing it from the Customs by keeping it in a pocket under the passenger seat of the Renault. No one knew of its existence, not even Diana.

It often made Sandy chuckle when he thought of his car sitting in the garage at home, so innocent-looking, yet harboring a lethal weapon. It was even more uproarious to recall that, out of the kindness of his heart, he'd lent the car to Denis a couple of times while he was staying with them. That miserable milksop would have turned even paler if he'd known about the gun.

But by the time he came to leave the hotel for his assignation, Sandy had decided that all danger lay in Denis' imagination. He'd telephoned the Garage Rivery during the day and found it to be authentic, and his first sight of it confirmed his own belief that it was respectable. It stood in one of the narrow dark streets that lie behind the Sacré Coeur; it wasn't small or dark but a modern well-lit establishment with the usual row of gas pumps and behind them a store and the sheds where repairs were made.

Sandy couldn't find a space to park the car on the garage forecourt without obstructing the way to the pumps, so he left it up against a wall that bordered the long alley between the store and the sheds.

There was no one in the garage office except the manager who succeeded in making Sandy understand that they were closing at 7:30. As it was only just 7:00 that left ample time to meet Monsieur

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Thousand Apologies and get the whole matter settled. Sandy chuckled to himself when he remembered Denis' forebodings. As if anything of that nature could happen in a well-lit much-frequented place like this.

He wondered rather scornfully where Denis was now. Sitting by himself probably in a little dark cinema, watching the kind of French film Sandy would pay not to see, though he'd often paid well enough to see the other kind. Contentedly, he surveyed the cars which kept arriving for gas. One of them, sooner or later, would contain his man. He mustn't be impatient.

But when it got to be 7:20 and no one had turned up, when nobody had rushed in full of breathless apology and requests for an immediate examination of the Renault, he began to pace up and down the forecourt. They were preparing to close; a couple of mechanics were leaving and going off on motorbikes.

Sandy looked searchingly up and down the dark street. Although the street lamps were lit, the place had a somber lonely look, overcast as it was by the rear of the great cathedral. There was no one about and no car but the Renault. When the manager turned off the lights and came out to lock up, there was nothing left for Sandy to do but to go and sit in his car.

Montmartre may be a place of gaiety near the Pigalle, of twinkling signs and lights as bright as fruit drops, of crowded bars and snug little theaters, but it is also a place of ancient darkness, a warren of deep lanes that seem chiseled into the hillside. Sandy couldn't help feeling vulnerable in his isolation, a target for easy violence in the one car left, and that car immediately identifiable by the mark that had been put on it.

After a few moments he switched off the interior light and reached under the seat for the Luger. Of course it was absurd, all his disquiet due to that fool Denis; but with the gun in his pocket he felt much more secure, and he settled down to wait once more.

It was 7:40 when he saw the man enter the garage forecourt. It was only a dim figure, heavily raincoated, but it was enough. Monsieur Thousand Apologies at last, and he was alone. Well, they couldn't do much tonight—the place was closed thanks to the man's tardiness.

But that might stand him in good stead, Sandy thought. A man who was late and admit-

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tedly in the wrong would be in a false position to quibble. Sandy made up his mind that he'd settle for £50 and call it a day. He'd buy the bloke a drink in one of the bars he'd passed on his way up and then—why shouldn't he drop in on Marie Laure for a couple of hours?

He got out of the car, locking it carefully, and made his way past the gas pumps up to the office. The pallid lamplight was augmented by his own flashlight. He looked about him for the writer of the note, but he'd disappeared. Maybe they'd missed each other, and finding no one by the office, the man had made at once for the Renault he had so wantonly scarred.

Sandy went back. As before, the Rue des Chattes itself was deserted, empty of all vehicles. Monsieur Thousand Apologies hadn't come by car. Sandy thought he heard a footfall behind him and he wheeled. He turned rather sharply for one who felt as confident and in command of the situation as he did, and he gave a little laugh of reassurance at such an unexpected display of nerves.

His laugh was answered by a low dull snigger. Sandy froze. He put his hand to his pocket where the Luger was and started back toward the garage office.

The sound wasn't repeated. Had it been only an echo, the reverberation of his own laugh thrown back by these walls? He took a deep breath and called out, "Hello! Is anyone there? *Voilà que j'y suis.* I'm here, by the office."

A deep silence answered him. What the hell was the guy playing at? He was in here somewhere, he must be—Sandy had seen him come in. And now he began seriously to consider Denis' theory. Well, what if it were true? What if it was Marie Laure's lover who had crept up in the dark and was waiting to spring on him from behind one of those sheds? The man was alone, and Sandy had the Luger. That *would* be something to tell the boys, how he'd confronted this small-time gangster and sent him squealing off to his woman with his tail between his legs.

Resolutely, Sandy set off in search of Monsieur Thousand Apologies, treading softly and with great care down the long alley that ran between the main building and the repair sheds. It led finally into a small yard. He switched on his flashlight and surveyed this yard which was as gloomy and medieval-looking as the front was modern.

The thin beam of his flash shone on dilapidated black brickwork and sagging beams,

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flitted over a couple of empty doorways like the entrances to caves, lit up briefly a mountain of old car tires. From this heap of serpentine coils Sandy saw a shadow snake out and flicker into one of the caves.

He tensed and put the light out. Thrusting it into his left hand, he felt for the Luger with his right. A piece of timber creaked. Sandy slipped into the nearest cavern mouth and found himself in a brick tunnel. He closed his hand over the gun.

Immediately behind him—he came hard up against it—was a wooden door. Good, an excellent position to be in. Let Monsieur show himself now and he'd be ready for him. He brought the gun out and as his fingers tightened over it he felt on the metalwork an unaccustomed roughness as of sharp unfiled projections, like tiny thorns on its surface.

Although he had never actually fired the Luger, he had often handled it and taken pride in the perfection of its workmanship. Never had it felt like this. Cautiously, holding both under the hem of his jacket, he brought the light from the flash to bear on the gun. A shiver convulsed him and he almost cried out. It wasn't the Luger he was holding but a toy weapon, the kind children play with, exactly the kind, in fact, that his own boy played with. Could his son have discovered the Luger and substituted . . . ? But there was no time to consider the awful possibilities of that now.

Sandy was trembling. He wouldn't be able to deceive a soul with this travesty of a weapon, and anyway he knew he'd never have the nerve to thrust it in a man's back while knowing it wasn't the genuine article. Besides, this man was a gangster, experienced in such things. Sandy would have to get out and get out fast.

A heavy sweat stood on his forehead. He put up his hand and wiped away the wetness. Why had he been such a fool as to come into this pitch-dark labyrinth without first checking the gun?

His legs unsteady, he came back to the mouth of the tunnel and into the black hole of a yard. He didn't dare put on the flashlight. He spreadeagled his body against the damp broken wall and eased himself along it, ducking behind the heap of slimy tires. There was no sound. At the point where he had seen the snaky shadow, he slipped into another tunnel, longer than the first which had given him sanctuary and which had seemed, while he was armed, so good a vantage place.

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This tunnel was a passage at the end of which gleamed a faint light. Sandy began to run toward the light and had almost reached it when he heard a movement behind him. He flung himself hard against the wall and the bullet passed with terrifying swiftness, striking just where his head had been a second before and embedding itself in a wooden post.

He let out a cry of horror and sprang out of the passage into a pool of light. It came from a street lamp, but not one of those in the Rue des Chattes. Sandy didn't know where he was and he didn't care. There were no thoughts of subterfuge now, of trickery, but only of getting away, down, down into bright twinkling Montmartre whose sequined glittering he could just see through a gap in towering walls.

He plunged through this gap, not daring to look behind him, and found himself on a terrace. Above him, white and gleaming, more like a mosque than a church, soared the towers of the Sacré Coeur. The great cathedral looked like a palace of ice. The floodlighting which was turned on it left a lake of darkness at Sandy's feet, and above this black waste hung the glittering lights of Paris, yellow and white and flickering fireworks-red.

He had never been into the Sacré Coeur, but he knew that a series of flights of steps fell away from this point to the street below, and below that, not too far away, was the Pigalle Metro station. Meanwhile he was an easy target for Marie Laure's gunman-lover.

Where was he now? Biding his time perhaps, or creeping up on him by some other way which he would know well. Sandy ran to the wall that surrounds the terrace and to the head of the flight of steps that leads down, through thick bushes, on the left-hand side. He had hardly reached the shelter of these winding narrow stairs and the obscurity of the bushes when he heard footfalls on the terrace. The footsteps moved slowly, hesitantly, as if the man who made them was uncertain, was searching.

Sandy clambered in among the shrubs, his hands scrambling in earth, torn by the spines of a thorn tree. But now the footsteps were approaching with a sure firmness of purpose.

Could the man smell him? Was his ear so supernaturally sensitive that he'd heard the whisper of turned soil and the gush of blood from Sandy's prickled hand? Almost fainting now, Sandy cowered back. Wild thoughts of begging for mercy, of taking a beating so long as

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his life were spared, brought him to his knees, and he was on his knees, gasping, when the branches were pushed aside and he looked up into the eyes of Denis Crawford.

"You wished to see me, Monsieur le Commissaire?"

"You are very punctual, Monsieur Crawford. Please take a chair. First let me express the sympathies of the police department on the loss of your friend."

Denis Crawford gave a slight grave nod. He sat down and faced the official across the polished desk.

"I doubt if I can help you, Monsieur," Denis said. "I went to the cinema last night and retired early to bed. I can only tell you what, I believe, my colleagues have already told you, that Monsieur Vaughan went out last night to keep an appointment with a man who had damaged his car."

"But you were of the opinion, according to Monsieur Shaw, that this man was, in fact, the lover of a woman with whom Monsieur Vaughan had been having relations? Monsieur Shaw has told us you warned Monsieur Vaughan not to keep this decidedly suspicious appointment. How unfortunate your good advice was not taken! If it had been, Monsieur Vaughan would not have been found in the grounds of the Sacré Coeur this morning with a Luger bullet through his head. Another such bullet has been found in the woodwork of the Garage Rivery buildings. It would appear that Monsieur Vaughan was pursued but was not, alas, able to escape his attacker. You can throw no light on this man's identity, I suppose?"

"None, I regret. Monsieur Vaughan did not tell me this woman's name or address. But if the gun has been found, I foresee no difficulty in your tracing its owner."

"Unfortunately, there will be great difficulty. How many Frenchmen possess such a weapon, obtained by themselves or their fathers *pendant la guerre?* During the war large numbers were taken from the bodies of German soldiers. No, *c'est difficile.* But we shall try, we shall make all efforts. The telephone number that we discovered in Monsieur Vaughan's address book—freshly inscribed there, we believe—is a Paris number but that of a most respectable dental surgeon. Nor do we know the numbers of the notes, five hundred francs, which Monsier Shaw has informed me Monsieur Vaughan was carrying on him last night and of which he was robbed. So

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it will not, as you see, be an easy case. Now, Monsieur, you return to London today, do you not?"

"With your permission."

"Certainly you have my permission. You are acquainted with the widow of Monsieur Vaughan?"

"I know her slightly."

"Then will you do the police department the great service of returning to this unfortunate lady certain possessions of her husband, his watch, his wedding ring, and so on?"

"It will be, Monsieur le Commissaire, if not a pleasure, a willingly undertaken duty."

They shook hands. The Commissaire thanked Denis Crawford for his cooperation, complimented him on his French, and expressed the hope that he would return to Paris under happier circumstances.

Denis took Sandy's watch and wedding ring to Diana Vaughan. Then, in his old-fashioned way, he set about a decorous courtship of her. She seemed grateful for his attentions and enjoyed being taken out by him for drives with her children. He arranged for the sale of the Renault and came to her house two evenings a week to coach her little boy in French for his coming examination. On her birthday he sent her red roses.

When a year had gone by since Sandy's death, he could wait no longer. He asked her to marry him.

"Oh, my dear," she said with a little laugh that was only a shade less derisive than Sandy's, "didn't you know? I thought everyone knew by now. I'm engaged to Malcolm Shaw. I don't suppose it matters your knowing, but we were lovers for ever so long before Sandy died. We're getting married next month."

Denis Crawford put 500 francs on the table. "Buy yourself a wedding present," he said, and he walked out of the house.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Rand spy-detective story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The newest story about Rand—the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications—contains some familiar ingredients and some decidedly unfamiliar ones. Among the former is a ring of electronic eavesdroppers—"the balloon-man affair"; among the latter is a talking house . . .

Behind these events is an ominous sign of the times—a drastic budget cut that may reduce Rand's department by half of its manpower. The prospect was devastating to Rand, but his assistant Parkinson reminded him: "I know it's bad, but in a way, sir, isn't it what we've been striving toward? A world where they wouldn't need us any more?"

Is Parkinson idealistic or naive? A world in which there is no longer any need for spies and counterspies, for secret messages and decoding machines? Well, we can all dream, can't we? . . .

THE SPY AND THE TALKING HOUSE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Reynolds parked his car on the side of the road and walked quickly up to the front door. There were no other vehicles in sight, and that was always a good sign. It meant he didn't have to wait for others to leave before he talked to the house.

He entered the living room, glanced at the contemporary furniture, and wondered once more if he was expected to sit down. He never did, because somehow it always seemed more suitable to remain standing. After a moment's silence he said, "I'm here."

"So I see," the house answered.

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"I thought you'd want a report on the radio cabs."

"Go ahead."

Reggie Reynolds shifted his feet nervously. "I've placed amplifier microphones in twenty-two cabs so far. With luck we'll double that number within a month."

"Very good. What about Seaweed?"

Seaweed was the code name for a ship that served as an information relay point. "All's well there. The cipher messages are going through, and there's no sign the government's wise to them."

The house grunted. "You're doing well, Reggie. Keep it up."

"Thank you."

"Someone's coming now. You'd better go. Come again next week."

Reynolds hurried out of the living room, past the large wall mirror with the fireplace opposite it. A young man and woman entered as he was leaving, and he wondered if they had come to talk to the house too. He nodded and smiled at them.

He drove away from the house, heading back to London, and reflected that it hadn't gone badly at all. His report had been well received by the house, and he continued in its good graces. Meanwhile, he'd gathered a bit more information for the package he was preparing to give Parkinson. The book, the list, and now the house. That should be worth the money he was getting, and more.

He was ten minutes away from the house, traveling west through Brentwood, when the car was torn apart by a violent explosion that could be heard for miles around.

Hastings greeted Rand at the door and motioned him to a chair. "I've just heard about the budget, and I thought you'd want to know."

"Is it as bad as we feared?"

"We're cut to the bone, Rand. Concealed Communications will lose half of its staff."

"Half!" That was much worse than he'd been led to believe.

"The war's been over nearly thirty years, Rand. Even the Cold War's pretty much over now. And this is the first cut Double-C has had to take. I hear rumors that one of the departments might be phased out completely."

Rand had never felt so helpless. "But—but we're busy! There are messages pouring in at every hour of the day!"

"Nothing a reduced staff couldn't handle, Rand. Naturally you can keep Parkinson and the other old-timers."

He'd never thought of young

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Parkinson as an old-timer, but maybe he was. Maybe they all were. Rand sighed and said, "I realize a good many of my recent investigations have only peripherally involved codes and ciphers, but there's still a good deal of work to be done."

"I'm sorry," Hastings said. "It's as much a blow to me as it is to you."

Rand went back to his office in the Double-C section, a saddened man whose face clearly showed it. Parkinson did not have to ask how things had gone. "As bad as that, sir?" he asked simply.

"Half of the department. Gone, just like that! Some budget-minded bureaucrat with a sharp pencil—"

Parkinson stared out the window. "I know it's bad, but in a way, sir, isn't it what we've been striving toward? A world where they wouldn't need us any more? I understand they've cut back in America too, and in Russia."

"I know, I know," Rand said. "I'm being unreasonable. But this thing has been like my baby for nearly ten years."

"It won't be gone. There'll still be a Double-C. When you started it you had fewer than half of the staff you have now. You managed then. In fact, you managed quite well."

"I suppose so," Rand agreed with reluctance. "It's just that—"

"Here's something to take your mind off it, if you're interested."

Rand scanned the newspaper account of a car explosion at Brentwood, north of the city. "What about it? Probably some Irish terrorist on his way to London with a bomb that went off too soon. Happens all the time these days."

"Scotland Yard thought it was something like that at first too, sir, until they managed to identify the victim. His name was Reggie Reynolds. Remember?"

"Reynolds. Reynolds?" Rand pored over the files of his memory. "Wasn't he the one who was using a cipher to pass information on narcotics smuggling?"

Parkinson nodded. "They were bringing in Number Four heroin in diplomatic pouches. Reynolds turned informer and managed to stay out of prison. Since then he's continued to act as an informer for various branches."

"You think someone found out and killed him?" Rand asked. "What's he been working on?"

"This ring of electronic eavesdroppers. The balloon-man affair."

Rand nodded. The thing had

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started while he was in Egypt some months back, and Parkinson had taken on the investigation, working closely with the Internal Security unit. A man selling balloons near Parliament had been struck and killed by a drunken driver. The accident itself was not suspicious, but while examining the body the police had discovered elaborate electronics gear hidden under the man's shabby coat. And the stick on one of the balloons concealed an antenna for picking up conversations in the rooms of Parliament itself.

From there the investigation had led to the discovery of tiny radio transmitters secreted in a number of government offices in London. The full facts had been kept from the press, but the search for the people behind the buggings had continued in earnest.

"What's Double-C's current position in the investigation?" Rand asked Parkinson.

The younger man smiled. "Reggie Reynolds was working on an angle for me. I didn't want to bother you about it till now, sir."

"A cipher?"

"The eavesdroppers again. As near as we can tell, it's a private espionage ring gathering random information for sale to the highest bidder. The information from Reynolds was that they have listening devices planted all over London, not just in Parliament. The information—often no more than random bits and pieces—is collected and stored in a computer until it can be pieced together and sold."

"A computer!"

"We live in an electronic age, sir. There are hundreds of computers in use around London. A programmer with access to one could easily feed the information into it."

"What sort of information?"

"Right now they're strong on Middle East affairs. Since the latest Arab-Israeli war both sides are willing to pay well for intelligence. A comment passed between ambassadors in a taxi or a passing remark at a diplomatic cocktail party—these are the things the eavesdroppers deal in."

"I see."

"They're using a cipher to transmit information to buyers, and that's what's got us stumped. We've collected a file of messages over an inch thick, but we haven't broken the cipher yet."

"If they use a computer to store data, they certainly must use a cipher machine for their messages. Or even a computer. Attached to an ordinary teletype machine, a small computer

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can produce a stream of digital pulses or numbers that would act something like a scrambler."

"And be almost impossible to decipher."

"Not necessarily," Rand pointed out. "If we could crack just one message, we'd have the key to the thing. Even though the computer or rotor machines are constantly changing, we could use computers at this end too, to run through possible letter combinations and produce the necessary printouts almost at once. The department already has computers programmed for machine-encoded ciphers, so it wouldn't be that big a job."

"We still need to crack that one message, sir."

"Reynolds didn't supply anything before he died?"

"In his last report he said he was onto something, but they killed him before he could deliver."

"Perhaps I'll have a look at where he lived, if you'll give me the address." It wasn't really his job, and Parkinson could have done it just as well, but he was anxious to be out of there and doing something. The thought of all the people he'd be losing was more than he wanted to dwell on just then.

Reggie Reynolds had maintained a flat on Dorchester Street, not far from the river, and Rand went there first. A uniformed bobby was on duty at the door and he eyed Rand with open distrust. "Investigation in progress here, sir. No one allowed to enter."

"Who's in charge?"

"Inspector Stephens, sir."

Rand grinned. He knew Stephens well. "Would you tell him Jeffery Rand is here to see him?"

The policeman hesitated, then entered the flat to deliver the message. He returned in a moment and ushered Rand inside without a word. Inspector Stephens was in the kitchen, his coat off and fingers deep into a large canister of flour.

"Baking a cake, Inspector?" Rand asked and the officer returned to his post at the door.

"Ah, Rand. I should have known they'd send you to torment me again." Stephens was a fatherly figure whose outer gruffness hid a shrewd brain and a basic goodness.

"Is this the sort of thing Scotland Yard Inspectors are reduced to doing now?"

"It's the budget cuts, you know," Stephens replied with a chuckle.

"I know."

"They hit Double-C too?"

"Cut in half."

"Sorry about that." He took

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his fingers out of the flour. "Nothing here. I've been through every inch of this place looking for hiding places. Couldn't trust the job to anyone else."

"Then you know of Reynolds' connection with the eavesdropping ring."

"Oh, yes. We know he was killed because he was an informer too. But that's the end of the trail. The balloon man, and now Reynolds. Both dead, both dead ends."

"You found nothing?"

"On the contrary, I found a great deal. But it means nothing. Come look at this." He led the way to the bedroom.

On the tufted spread he'd placed a number of objects which Rand scanned with interest. First was a child's picture book, *The Royal Squirrel*, which Rand leafed through without enlightenment. A girl's name, Rosetta, was written on the flyleaf, but otherwise the book had no markings. It told the brief story of a squirrel at Windsor Castle, and was accompanied by garish drawings. Rand tried to remember when he'd ever been young enough to enjoy something like that.

The second item was a small black appointment book, bound in pebbled plastic that was supposed to resemble leather. Written in on the day of Reynolds' death was the notation, *talking house*. Rand lifted his eyes to look at Stephens. "Talking house?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. The bomb that killed him had a chemical fuse rather than a timer. That means it was put in the car only a short time before the explosion. He was heading back toward London when it happened. We can assume the bomb was placed in the car while he was at this mysterious destination."

"A talking house that places bombs in cars? Interesting."

Rand flipped through the pages of the appointment book, seeking something more. "Talking house could be code," Stephens suggested.

"Probably is, but for what? Or where?" There was nothing more of interest in the appointment book, and Rand tossed it aside, going on to the next item. "What's this?"

"A listing of London taxicab drivers."

"Where did you find all these things?" Rand asked.

Inspector Stephens smiled. "Reggie Reynolds was an informer, and his mind didn't run to ingenious hiding places. They were in a plastic bag in the very first place I looked —the toilet tank."

"Perhaps he thought it was ingenious."

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"Or perhaps he wanted us to find it quickly, if anything happened to him."

"Which it did," Rand observed. "Let me take this list of cab drivers. I might do a little checking for you."

Stephens grunted his assent. "Take the whole mess if you want. Maybe your boys can find some sort of secret message in *The Royal Squirrel*."

Rand delivered the children's book into Parkinson's hands. "A book code?" was the young man's first thought.

"Hardly. There aren't more than two hundred words to the whole story, and they're all simple ones designed for a preschool reader. No, the book has some other significance. Check it out."

"Invisible ink?"

"Maybe," Rank admitted, although he doubted it.

He left Double-C with the list of cab drivers in his pocket. There were too many to check out completely, but he wasn't yet ready to assign the task to others. He wanted to make a few calls himself.

The first name on the list, with a tiny check mark next to it, was Henry Watkin. Rand located him finally at a mid-London garage where a score of the big black cabs were parked in neat rows awaiting their drivers. Watkin was a round-faced Cockney who resented Rand's questions from the start.

"Don't know any Reggie Reynolds. Don't know him."

"He came to see you," Rand said, guessing on the basis of the check mark.

"People come see me all the time. People is my business."

"But you don't remember Reynolds?" Rand asked, producing a photo of the dead man taken at the time of his prior arrest.

"Don't know him," the man answered, barely glancing at the picture.

"What about a child named Rosetta? Ever hear the name?"

"No."

"Or a talking house?"

"A what?"

"Never mind," Rand said with a sigh. He was getting nowhere.

The second name on Reynolds' list had been crossed out, but Rand decided to try it anyway. He quickly established that the driver in question, Colin Frazer, was retired after having been crippled in an accident. No doubt that was why he'd been crossed out.

Frazer lived in a lower middle-class area of the city, on a street of attached houses slowly going to seed. A middle-aged woman with deep blue eyes in a tired face opened

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the door on his second ring. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Frazer?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to see your husband, if I could."

"My husband is crippled. He doesn't see strangers."

Rand produced his identification. "Perhaps he'll see me. It's government business."

Mrs. Frazer studied the card for a long time, as if memorizing every word on it. Finally she said, "Wait a minute. I'll see if he's awake."

She returned in a few moments to lead him into a cluttered dining room that had been haphazardly converted to care for the needs of a balding man in a wheelchair. Colin Frazer seemed older than his wife by several years, perhaps as a result of his accident, and his eyes were just a bit bleary as he held out a wrinkled hand to Rand. "What does the government want with me? They going to increase my pension?"

"I'm afraid I didn't come about that," Rand admitted. "I'm seeking information about a man named Reggie Reynolds."

"Chap who got blown up yesterday."

"That's right. How did you hear about it?"

"I read the newspapers. Not much else to do, so I read the newspapers." He motioned toward his wife in the doorway. "Margaret goes off and leaves me every day. The papers are the only thing I have."

"You know that's not true, Colin." Then, to Rand, "I have a job with a real-estate agent. It brings in enough money to keep us going."

Looking at her, Rand could see she had the strength to keep them both going. "Does either of you know this man?" he asked, producing the picture.

Colin Frazer squinted at it from his wheelchair. "This is Reynolds?"

"Yes."

He squinted some more. "Margaret, isn't this the man who came here last month, from the company?"

She studied the picture. "It might be. I'm not certain."

"Sure, it's him. But his face was a little fuller."

"That picture is a year or so old," Rand said. "But tell me what he wanted."

"I don't exactly know. I thought he came about my pension, but he didn't. He seemed to be snooping around. Maybe the company hired him to make sure I was really crippled. Or the insurance company."

"The settlement is still pending," his wife explained. "A lorry ran over his legs in the taxi garage. It was clearly the

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company's responsibility."

"This Reynolds seemed nervous. He asked a few questions about the accident and then left," Frazer said.

"What name did he use?"

"Smyth," Mrs. Frazer spoke up. "I remember him now."

"Yes," the man in the wheelchair agreed. "It was Smyth."

"Did he have a list of London cab drivers with him?"

"He may have, I don't know. He mentioned calling on a number of others."

"But when he saw you were crippled he left without stating the reason for his visit?"

"That's about it, I guess."

Rand puzzled over this information. He'd learned at the cab company of Frazer's condition, and surely Reynolds would have too. Yet he'd come out here anyway to see the man. He spoke with Frazer and his wife for a few more minutes and then rose to leave.

As Margaret Frazer saw him to the door he had a sudden thought. "Did Reynolds —Smyth—happen to mention anyone named Rosetta while he was here?"

Mrs. Frazer frowned thoughtfully at the qeustion. "A child," she said finally. "As he left I saw there was a child waiting for him in the car. I think he said her name was Rosetta."

"His child?"

"I don't know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Frazer. You've been a great help."

Rand decided to try one more name before he turned the list over to his staff, or to Stephens' men. The third was Ronald Dunn, with a check mark before his name. He learned Dunn was out on the road, but the cab dispatcher quickly got in touch with him by two-way radio.

Rand arranged to meet him at a little pub across from the Victoria Gate at Hyde Park. It was obviously a place where drivers relaxed between calls, and Rand found him at the bar with several other men. "You would be Rand?" he asked.

"That's right. I have a few questions."

"What about?"

"Can we go to a table?"

"Sure." Ronald Dunn moved slowly, patting his stomach as if to settle the beer he'd obviously consumed. Rand didn't comment about drinking on duty. That was not his business.

"It's about Reggie Reynolds. He came to see you."

"Don't know him."

"He may have used the name of Smyth. He may have had a child with him."

"Smyth? Sure, I know him. But no child."

"What did he want?"

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"It was a business proposition." Dunn shifted nervously on his chair. "Private, you know."

"Look, I'm working on an internal security matter. It could have the utmost importance to the country. If you don't cooperate fully, you may find yourself serving twenty years."

"Twenty years! For what?"

"Espionage. Treason." He was laying it on thick because Dunn seemed the sort to scare easily.

"Look, man, I don't want none of that!"

"Then you'd better talk."

"What do you want to know?"

"About Smyth."

Dunn stirred uneasily. "He wanted me to put something in my cab."

"What sort of thing?"

"For the two-way radio. An amplifier gadget. It seemed harmless enough."

"An amplifier for the back seat? The passenger compartment?"

"Well. . .yes."

"So that conversations between passengers could be monitored back at the office?"

"I guess so. He gave me fifty pounds and I didn't ask questions."

"Did he do the same with other drivers?"

"I guess so."

"Did he mention the name Rosetta?"

"No."

"And you saw no child?"

"No."

"Is the device still in your cab?"

"I guess so. I haven't even looked."

"Let's look now, shall we?"

Dunn followed him to the car and pointed out a tiny microphone no bigger than a fingernail. "Do you want it?" the driver asked.

"Leave it for now. But I may be back."

He outlined to Hastings the progress he'd made, mentioning Stephens' finds in Reggie's flat and his questioning of the first three drivers on the cab list. Hastings listened with interest and then said, "I think you've got something, Rand. And it couldn't come at a better time. If we break this eavesdropping ring quickly, and if Double-C gets credit for it, the government might have second thoughts about that budget cut. It's something of a long shot, but it might pay off."

"That's all very well," Rand agreed, "but I don't see where I have anything. We can pull those listening devices out of the cabs, but whom do we arrest? Reynolds is dead, and the clues he left us are all but incomprehensible."

"It seems clear enough to

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me," Hastings said. "Either the head of the cab company or at least the radio dispatcher has to be involved. Somebody's back at that radio listening to those conversations, maybe even taping them."

"I suppose so," Rand agreed.

"I can talk to Scotland Yard and arrange a raid on the taxi garage. We'll get some headlines and you might get your full budget back."

"Let me think about it," Rand said. "I'll get back to you."

"Don't think too long. Inspector Stephens is a smart policeman. If he lets it out first, Scotland Yard will get all the credit."

"Is credit so important?"

"It is when you're fighting the budget cutters. This case is one that strikes home to every member of Parliament —remember, listening devices were found in their own offices. If you can bring the eavesdroppers to justice, you'll make some very important friends for Double-C."

"I'll get back to you," Rand said again.

He left Hastings and went down to Concealed Communications. In the cipher room they were talking together in small groups that split apart as he entered. He didn't have to ask what the topic of conversation was. The word was out on the budget cut. They were wondering which of them would still have jobs next month.

Parkinson saw him and hurried over. "Not a thing on that child's book, sir. No pin pricks or microdots or invisible writing. We've been all over it."

"And yet Reynolds thought it important enough to hide. Why, Parkinson? Why?"

"I can't imagine, sir."

"It belonged to a child named Rosetta, and she may have been with him once."

"He had no children, sir. We checked that."

"A niece?"

"None we can find."

Rand walked to the window and stared out. He was thinking again about the talking house. "Check the atlas, Parkinson. See if there might be a town north of London called Rosetta."

After a moment Parkinson replied from across the room. "Nothing, sir. Nothing even close. The only Rosetta in the whole world is a town in northern Egypt, at one of the mouths of the Nile."

"Back to Egypt again," Rand said with a sigh. "That country haunts me!"

"You think the name refers to something in the Arab-Israeli War? A military base, perhaps?"

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"No, no. We're letting our imaginations carry us away. As William of Occam might have said, we must stick to the obvious. It was a girl's name in a child's book, and he was seen with a child. The mystery is not the name, but the book."

Parkinson hefted the file of cipher messages. "We've intercepted another transmission on their frequency, sir. The cipher room is working on it."

"But not too hard, from the looks of them," Rand remarked glumly.

"It has to be a machine cipher. They send a string of nulls at the beginning to establish which rotors are in use, and then carry on with the message. We could work on it for weeks without getting anywhere."

"You might be lucky," Rand said. "I once cracked a machine cipher on the third try. You've got men, you've got computers. Get at it."

"The messages appear beamed toward a ship in the North Sea. I suppose they're then relayed to their final destination."

"It's a big operation," Rand admitted. "A lot bigger than we first imagined."

"What does Hastings think?"

"Does that concern you?" Rand asked sharply, immediately sorry that he'd spoken harshly to the man. "Forget it, Parkinson. I don't mean to take your head off. Hastings thinks we should ask Scotland Yard to raid the taxi company and discover a great many listening devices."

"They're in the cabs?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't we?"

Rand turned to him. "I've never gone after headlines at Double-C, Parkinson."

"I know that, sir." He shifted his feet. "But if the budget—"

"Damn the budget! I started this bureau on a shoestring and I'll keep it going that way if I have to!" He looked around at the banks of spinning computer reels and wondered if he really meant his words. The world had changed a great deal in ten years.

He left Parkinson alone and went into his office, feeling suddenly tired. He settled into the familiar armchair and dialed Inspector Stephens' private number at Scotland Yard. "Inspector? Glad I caught you in. Rand here."

"Any luck with that list of cab drivers?"

"None to speak of. But I did uncover something of the plot Reynolds was engaged in."

"Oh?"

Rand filled him in quickly on the hidden microphones. "It's more of the eavesdropping

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ring's attempt at stealing secrets wholesale."

"Think we should move in on the taxi company?"

"Hastings thinks so. He thinks I could use the good publicity."

Stephens hesitated. "What do *you* think?"

"If it's the company behind it, why send Reynolds around to the individual drivers with offers of fifty pounds each? The company could have planted those bugs in the garage without the drivers ever knowing."

"But the radio dispatcher—"

"No," Rand said. "The dispatcher would hear too many messages. The conversations are going out on a different frequency. The dispatcher doesn't get them at all. But someone else does. The same person or persons who received the balloon-man's messages from Parliament."

"So what do we do?"

"Reynolds was reporting to someone—someone who realized he was a police spy and had him killed. That's the person we want. The person in the talking house."

"So you're back to his appointment book again."

"Yes."

"Well, I'll tell you this—if there is a talking house it's within twenty or thirty minutes' drive from Brentwood, probably north or east since Reynolds was heading back toward London."

"How did you figure the time?"

"Our bomb squad reports that it was a dynamite bomb triggered with a vial of sulfuric acid and potassium chlorate, plus a little gunpowder. In this type of bomb the acid vial is inverted. It eats through the cork or paper stopper and hits the potassium chlorate, causing a flash fire that ignites the gunpowder and triggers the dynamite. My men figure it had to be timed close—no more than thirty minutes—to insure that Reynolds would still be in the car when it went off."

Something was gnawing at the back of Rand's memory. It wasn't about bombs or microphones, though. It was about Egypt. "Look, Stephens, can you do something for me? Can you contact the local police in that area and get me a list of all new subdivisions—new homes that have recently been built? I'm especially interested in ones that haven't yet been sold."

"I can do it, but it's a bit late in the day now."

"Have it for me in the morning. I'll be driving up that way then."

Rand saw the sign from the highway and turned in at the first street. It was only ten minutes' drive from Brentwood—a bit closer than he and Stephens had expected. He pulled the car off the road and parked, looking

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up at the new two-story house done in a modern Tudor style. Yes, he thought, this would be the place.

The sign in front read: *Come in and talk to me! The talking house answers all your questions! A home of tomorrow from Homes Today Ltd.!*

He nodded to a man and woman who were just leaving and stepped through the door into a cozy living room. A fireplace, sofa, chairs, a mirror on the opposite wall, shag rug underfoot. It was better than Rand's apartment by far.

"May I help you?" the house asked.

"I'm looking for a house," Rand said.

"Homes Today start at ten thousand pounds, and we would be happy to help arrange financing."

"I think this is the house I've been looking for. My name is Rand."

"Notice the large living room," the house continued, "and the ample dining and kitchen facilities. Are you married? Do you have a family?"

"I'm here to arrest you," Rand said.

"That would be rather difficult," the house responded.

Rand heard a movement in the doorway behind him and turned to see a smiling stranger in the act of raising a silenced pistol and aiming it at him. Then, in a blur of movement he could barely follow, Inspector Stephens was knocking the gun aside and someone else from Scotland Yard was grabbing the man's other arm.

Rand didn't wait to watch the battle. Turning toward the large mirror, he picked up a bronze lamp from the nearest table and hurled it at the glass. There was a shattering clatter as the glass fell in, like a window. Rand used a chair to step through the broken mirror and into the room on the other side.

"I feel a bit like Alice in Wonderland," he said, leveling his own gun at the voice of the talking house, the woman who sat behind the microphone and the one-way mirror. It was Margaret Frazer.

Inspector Stephens remained at the house after Mrs. Frazer and the gunman were taken away. "I played along with you," he told Rand. "Now you owe me some explanations. What did Reynolds' clues mean, and how did you know it would be this Frazer woman?"

"Luck. Intuition."

"I've known you too long to believe that."

"All right," Rand replied with a smile. "The eavesdropping ring was transmitting the information it collected to a

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ship in the North Sea—sending it by radio. The ship passed it on to those who sold the information to interested governments. That much we knew. But Double-C couldn't break the machine cipher that the ring was using. Reggie Reynolds was reporting to Parkinson, so he knew the information we needed. He had that children's book hidden away to deliver to Parkinson at their next meeting. He'd promised something important on the cipher, and that was to be it."

"A book cipher?"

"No, a Rosetta Stone."

"What?"

"The stone slab found by Napoleon's army near Rosetta, Egypt, in 1799. It bore parallel inscriptions in Greek, hieroglyphic, and demotic characters, making possible the decipherment of ancient Egyptian writings. Someone—probably Mrs. Frazer—was being cute when they wrote the name Rosetta inside that book, but that's exactly what it was—a Rosetta Stone to their cipher system. Instead of using random nulls as most ciphers do, the ring began each transmission with an entire book—the two hundred words of text contained in *The Royal Squirrel*. It not only served as a null to foil decipherment, but it also allowed the receiver to determine which rotor wheels were being used that day. With the right combination of wheels, the story of *The Royal Squirrel* came through, followed by the actual message. Reynolds knew that with the book in our hands we could quickly decipher any message they sent—simply because we'd have the translation of the first two hundred words."

"And Mrs. Frazer?"

"I asked her about Rosetta and she said Reynolds had called a child by that name. But yesterday when Parkinson mentioned Rosetta, Egypt, and I tumbled to the significance of the book as a sort of Rosetta Stone, I knew Margaret Frazer must have lied. She not only lied, but she knew enough about the reason for my question to invent a child to tie in with the child's book. It was all misdirection on her part, but when I realized the truth it also told me she had to be deeply involved."

"And the talking house?"

"She mentioned she worked for a real-estate agent. Connecting that with the notation about the talking house sent me out looking for real-estate developments in this area. The talking house gimmick—a sales person behind a one-way mirror who chats with prospective buyers—is a selling device that has been used in America. I felt

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sure when we found it that Margaret Frazer would be the house's voice."

"Why was Reynolds killed?"

"Because he visited the Frazer home and recognized Margaret's voice as that of the person he reported to in the talking house. He must have been suspicious already, because the company would have told him Frazer was crippled. When Margaret saw him there, she realized he knew her identity, so he had to die. I imagine that man with the pistol planted the actual bomb while she was listening to Reynolds' report inside the house."

"You think Mrs. Frazer's husband is involved?"

"I doubt it," Rand said. "She'd been on her own, supporting them, since his accident, and I think she fell into this. I believe we'll find that Homes Today uses a computer to list its available properties, and that same computer holds the raw information collected by the eavesdropping ring."

"Was she the head of it all, then?"

"She may be high up in the power structure, since Reynolds reported to her. But there must be others higher. She couldn't finance such a large-scale operation to begin with. I'd suggest a careful investigation of the Homes Today management. You might even want to check some of the houses they've built or sold during the past year. It would be a neat trick to build listening devices into new houses, especially those in high-priced areas popular with diplomats and their families."

"You think of everything, Rand."

"I try," he said with a smile. "I thought enough to have you backing me up today, in the event of a rear attack."

"I'll see the press gives you full credit for this—you and Double-C."

But Rand shook his head. "You can't release anything until you've got them all—the Homes Today people and everyone else."

"That might take weeks. What about the budget cut?"

"Double-C has survived all these years without publicity. I guess we can keep going a little longer." Rand headed for the door. "Come on, Inspector. Let's drive into town and I'll buy you a cup of coffee."

"Q"

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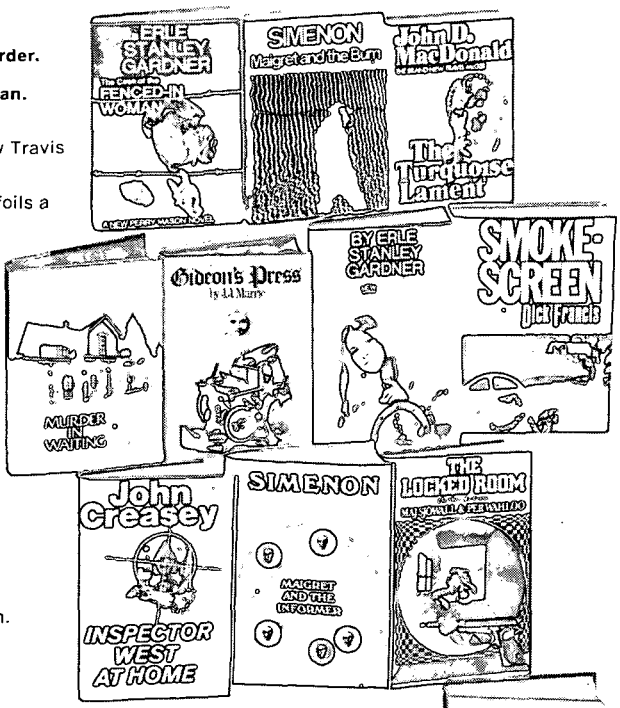

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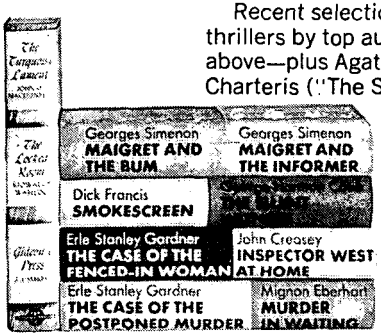

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